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Gavin Stevens, Faulkner's "Good Man"

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GAVIN STEVENS: rw
FAULKNER'S "GOOD MAN"

by
Carl Singleton

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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VITA

The author, Carl Sid Singleton, is the son of Rev. Vance Singleton and Agnes Singleton. He was born September 6, 1949, in Danville, Kentucky.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND METHOD OF PROCEDURE

"Dammit, Gavin," he said. "You can't do it. We all admit you're a lot of things but one of them ain't an ordained minister."
--The Town, p. 343

Indeed, Gavin Stevens, the most frequently appearing character in William Faulkner's fiction, is "a lot of things." His fellow Yoknapatawphans knew him primarily as County Attorney but also as a self-trained detective, Greek scholar, adolescent prankster, loquacious social critic, Southern gentleman, shrewd (and alternately gullible) intellectual, and so on. The speaker of the above quotation from The Town is Charles Mallison, Gavin's brother-in-law, who is trying to talk him out of conducting the funeral of Eula Varner Snopes. I introduce my work with it because it reveals two important things: not only that Gavin is "a lot of things," but also that he is successfully "a lot of things," for Mallison's use of the word admit indicates respect for Gavin's accomplishments and contributions to the community in his numerous capacities.

Mallison and the populace of Jefferson are by no means the only persons to recognize that Gavin is "a lot of things." Critics of Faulkner's literature have often recognized his complexity but have genuinely agreed about only one point: that he is puzzling. Everyone recognizes his divergent qualities and the different roles he plays in

the novels and short stories. Among the most frequent theories put forth to explain his character are that he is a mouthpiece for Faulkner, a detached observer, or merely a typical Southern intellectual. Some writers have made more imaginative suggestions, depending upon which work they happened to be discussing. William Doster, for example, has seen him as some sort of prophet ushering in a new era for the South.¹ Lynn Levins, in discussing the Snopes trilogy, has called him "Faulkner's crusading Roland," carrying on in the spirit and fashion of Don Quixote.² Walter Brylowski, in connection with Requiem for a Nun, has labeled him as "Faulkner's voice of the rational-empiric."³ Olga Vickery, in presenting an interpretation of the same work, called him a "Socratic midwife." These, of course, are only a few choice examples. I would point out that, even though there is no paucity of critical commentary about Gavin, there is to date no satisfactory explanation of his character as a whole. Most of my effort will be to explain what Gavin is by tracing his growth as a creation of Faulkner and his development as a person in his own right.

Perhaps the most often expressed view of Gavin is that he is merely a mouthpiece for Faulkner. Over and over again critics have

¹William C. Doster, "The Several Faces of Gavin Stevens," The Mississippi Quarterly, 2 (Fall, 1958), p. 191.

²Lynn Garterell Levins, Faulkner's Heroic Design (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 145.

³Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1968), p. 173.

⁴Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, 2 (Spring, 1953), p. 4.

especially suggested this in order to explain him. They do so not only in connection with the obvious instances where he is a spokesman in some capacity (Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun), but also in the two Snopes novels in which he appears. The following passage of criticism is typical:

When Faulkner fashions a true spokes-character, such as Gavin Stevens, the frequent result is a conflict of tone between the dramatic action and the moral commentary. In Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun Stevens is allowed to discuss at length redeeming actions that, as a rational adult, he is incapable of performing. . . .⁵

I take issue with anyone who labels Gavin a "true spokesman." One of the main reasons is that such complacency is too easy; for if we accept Gavin as such, then of course we possess spelled-out accessibility to Faulkner's insights and interpretations of all the stories in which Gavin appears. Thus we would know with certainty Faulkner's beliefs about racial problems (Intruder in the Dust), social justice (Requiem for a Nun), and social evils and hypocrisy (The Town and The Mansion). The reasons this cannot be is that Gavin in each of these is often too guilty of what can only be called long-winded foolishness. Cleanth Brooks has written that "Gavin Stevens occupies no privileged position in Faulkner's novels: sometimes he talks sense and sometimes he talks nonsense."⁶ The reason Gavin sometimes talks nonsense is that he characteristically suffers from a lack of understanding of his fellow man. In The Town and The Mansion he repeatedly does not perceive the motiva-

⁵Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 18.

⁶Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 279.

tions and entanglements of Flem Snopes, and must be enlightened by Ratliff. In these two works and also in Knight's Gambit it is repeatedly suggested and evidenced that he does not understand the other half of the human race: women. This is true not only in his relation with Eula and Linda Snopes, but also with respect to his twin sister Maggie. In Intruder in the Dust the story line itself depends upon the fact that he does not understand even the possibility of Lucas Beauchamp's innocence. Finally, in Requiem for a Nun, where he seemingly does understand Temple's situation, it is clear that he does not understand Nancy's. If Faulkner intended for Gavin to be his mouthpiece, he gagged him first.

Another popular interpretation of his role and character is to see him as a detached observer. This view is one which I do not fully understand for the simple reason that there is no novel or story in which Gavin is "detached" in any legitimate sense of the word. I can appreciate that he is often more of an observer than a participant, but the idea that he is "detached" is erroneous. Consider the following comment:

The characterization of Gavin Stevens represents the most serious weakness of the novel. In his other Yoknapatawpha County appearances he is sometimes an ineffectual witness and sometimes a behind-the-scenes moral agent. . . . In The Town Stevens is still primarily a detached witness, but he has an important role in the actions.⁷

Another critic has made a similar comment about the same novel: "Like a number of Southern aristocrats, Stevens is content to let others soil their hands with dirty work while he sits in the ivory tower of his

⁷Swiggart, p. 198.

office and tries to predict Flem's next move."⁸ "Detached observer" is an over-used identifying label for Gavin Stevens which has no practical applicability or profitable use in any of the places he appears. In all of the stories in the volume published as Knight's Gambit Gavin is central to the resolution of the murder plots and intrigues. It is correct that he is not directly involved with any of the crimes, but then neither is Perry Mason in his adventures. Similarly, he has not been a participant, or even a witness, in the crimes committed by Temple Drake and Nancy Mannigoe in Requiem for a Nun; yet he is singularly responsible for whatever expurgation there is of Temple's guilt. In the two Snopes novels he is still something of an observer; yet he is directly involved with the progression of the story, performing actions which affect the behavior, character, and general condition of other persons. Perhaps his role as observer is most pronounced in Intruder in the Dust, but even here he can never be called "detached" because of his role as Lucas's lawyer, Miss Habersham's friend, and especially as young Chick Mallison's moral guide. Faulkner himself says on this matter:

Well, Gavin had got out of his depth. He had got into the real world. While he was--could be--a county attorney, an amateur Sherlock Holmes, then he was at home, but he got out of that. He got into a real world in which people anguished and suffered, not simply did things which they shouldn't.⁹

⁸Doster, p. 194.

⁹Frederick L. Gwyon and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 140.

The point is, of course, that Gavin Stevens, whether acting in the adventuresome world of Sherlock Holmes or the suffering world of Temple Drake, is active. Faulkner's statements depict him as a character involved with people and matters surrounding him; he is not seen as a mere spectator.

That Gavin Stevens can be defined and explained as a typical Southern intellectual is the remaining popular view of him. Essentially I do not take issue with the fact that he is that: his degrees from Harvard and Heidelberg as well as his endeavors to translate the Bible back into the original Greek secure his position as such. My objection is that such a perspective is too limiting, for he is so much more than this. Yet over and over again critics have applied the term "Southern intellectual" to him and then dismissed him. William Doster has expressed this view, writing that Gavin is a "clever intellectual" who relies on "pure reason."¹⁰ He goes on to assert that he "thinks, thinks, thinks, and talks, talks, talks."¹¹ Another critic, also subscribing to the Southern intellectual interpretation, calls him "Faulkner's voice of the rational-empiric," as mentioned earlier.

As I said, I do not quibble with the fact that he is a Southern intellectual--the point is that he is not this and only this. Gavin relies on his education and intellectual acumen in carrying out other roles. For example, in the detective stories of Knight's Gambit

¹⁰Doster, p. 191.

¹¹Doster, p. 194.

his intellect supports him as lawyer-detective. But he is a lawyer-detective first, and Southern intellectual second. In Requiem for a Nun it has been suggested that he is an agent of goodness, Temple's conscience, the voice of justice, etc.; yet as any of these his intellectual capacities lend substance to these functions--it is not the other way around. In The Town and The Mansion he is several things, including unrequited lover of Eula and Linda, moral guide to Chick, lawyer for the community, and so on. Yet in each of these roles his mental abilities qualify him to act and perform as he does, and as such, they are secondary to these other qualities of his being. Perhaps in Intruder in the Dust they even get in his way, since his mentality as a Southern intellectual does not perceive the innocence of the Negro Lucas. The intellectual aspects of Gavin flounder in other notable instances, too. For example, he seldom truly understands the motivations of Flem Snopes; the rustic Ratliff always provides him with explanations. Cleanth Brooks has sensibly commented:

Doubtless, what Gavin says often represents what many Southerners think and what Faulkner himself--at one time or another--has thought. But Gavin is not presented a sage and wise counsellor of the community. His notions have to take their chances along with less "intellectual" characters.¹²

Advocates of the Southern intellectual theory also miss another point. Namely, that to be an "intellectual" in the society of which Faulkner writes is not an entirely favorable, or even desirable, position.

¹²Brooks, pp. 279-280.

Frederick Hoffman points out that to be a Southern intellectual is to be "a subject alternately of respect and ridicule."¹³

These three generalized interpretations of Gavin Stevens do offer some comment on his character. That is, often he is somewhat of an observer; and yes, he is always an intellectual; and perhaps at times he even voices opinions which Faulkner agrees with (although, of course, there is no way of knowing for sure). Again, these frequent interpretations of him are inadequate, bland, and of no substantial value, especially when we try to apply them to particular works to see his character as a whole.

On the other hand, the specialized attempts to explain him, while they may contribute to our understanding of his role and character in a particular work, are totally inadequate--at times obtuse--if applied to other works. They may help us understand a certain passage or appearance, but they have little to offer toward an understanding of Gavin Stevens the man, Gavin Stevens the person. He is not merely a character who is one thing in one book and something else in another, and tied to that other in name only (and so on for four novels, eight stories, and one play). Gavin Stevens is a person who matures by learning from his mistakes, and who feels, suffers, and endures. The fact that he appears more frequently than any other character in Faulkner's writings underscores his importance; he is not merely some sort of secondary figure in the resolution of all those plots.

¹³Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner (New Haven: United Printing Service, 1966), p. 101.

Olga Vickery has made the once-voiced statement that Gavin "shows a clear growth and development from book to book."¹⁴ My purpose is to explain and support this assertion in a lengthy fashion (she does not). A few critics have noted that he is an improvement over another Yoknapatawphan lawyer, Horace Benbow, who disappeared from the fiction for unexplained reasons. Still others have pointed out that in the two Snopes novels Gavin comes to learn something--at least about women. No one, however, has actually examined his growth and development. What I propose to do is discuss the experiences, maturation, and morality of Gavin as these occur in a definite and perceptible pattern. My focus will be upon what Faulkner (as quoted earlier) called Gavin's getting into the "real world." He begins as a moral agent, an honest and decent man acting to protect and enhance goodness and social stability; he then becomes a moral guide, providing assistance and direction for others; finally, he personally becomes more of a moral person, deciding between right and wrong actions in his own life. In this latter respect he retains the complexity of the two previous functions. These three terms will be dealt with at greater length later. At the present I wish to discuss the moral code of the Old South--and Gavin's relation to it, which is fundamental to understanding his outlook as a Southerner.

To begin with, nearly every quality of the code is otiose by Gavin's day. The code surely lingered on, however, and Gavin was entrapped by it in many ways. For purposes of this discussion, I wish to identify five major tenets of the code, since at one time or another

¹⁴Vickery, p. 1.

Gavin experiences both internal and external conflicts with all of them; he makes no appearance in which the validity of the code is not under attack.

(1) The special role of women, which required protection of their chastity to insure both public and private veneration, was very much alive.

(2) The social order was both a class and a caste system. White society was delineated by lines drawn between the old aristocracies and the poor white trash; however, there could be some social circulation between these two groups in some situations. On the other hand, the existence of both the black and white races was the framework for an order which could neither be transcended, violated, nor ignored. Hence white society itself was a class system, but the relationship of the two races was strictly a caste order.

(3) The South was yet predominantly agrarian; moreover, there was an evidenced determination from all involved that it would stay that way.

(4) The past and its traditions were revered with religious fervor; witness that the Episcopal Church in the South was not replaced so much by the Southern Baptist Convention as by folklore of the Civil War.

(5) Male hierarchy, chivalry, and primogeniture continued to exist in a virtually unaltered state.

These foremost counts of the code occupied a central (perhaps omnipresent) place in Faulkner's literature. Perhaps all of the author's characters basically subscribe to it in one important way or another,

and those who do not are victimized because of their "at odds" reasoning. This centrality, it must be recognized, is not due to the stability and value of the list. Faulkner's folks do not adhere to the code because of what it is, but because of what they think it stands for. Edmond Volpe explains this in his discussion of "The Bear":

As an introduction to the meaning of "The Bear," two aspects of "The Old People" require emphasis. The return of Sam and Ike to their sources is clearly an attempt to plunge deep into the unconscious and face the essential human being and his relation to the essential pattern of nature. Ike retrieves what has been tamed out of his blood, and by doing so discovers a code to live by--acceptance of natural conditions with pity and love but without weakness and regret. This code is further elaborated in "The Bear." The virtues of the code are those which touch the heart: honor, pride, pity, justice, courage, and love. These virtues of the heart are knowable only when the artificialities imposed by society are peeled away and the essential man is bared.¹⁵

In a general sense Ike McCaslin's effort in "The Old People" and "The Bear" is to transcend the code of the hunter in order to find a "code to live by." Gavin Stevens attempts a similar accomplishment in trying to transcend the code of the Old South. In the case of Ike, he is personally moving toward a code which he thinks has all the 'virtues. . . which touch the heart: honor, pride, pity, justice, courage, and love." In the case of Gavin, he is moving both personally and socially from an established code which has all the associations and identities of these virtues. In other words, to follow the code is to be virtuous in all the terms enumerated above. Thus, for example, the special role of the woman is maintained not because women are inherently deserving of such protection (except in a social context), but because protecting them

¹⁵Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), p. 243.

is a preservation of virtue. Specifically, Gavin's "defense" of Eula Snopes is not so much for her own honor (the whole town, as Faulkner repeatedly points out, vicariously participates in the hypocrisy by protecting her adultery) as for the honor of the code. Time after time Gavin finds himself in situations where the code requires a certain behavior and performance. The problems (and Gavin's moral maturation) occur as he perceives and deals with his gradual recognition that the code and virtue are not one and the same. On several occasions he is trapped in predicaments where goodness, truth, and justice are not served when he acts to maintain the code.

It should be recognized that Faulkner does not develop a complete moral system with Gavin Stevens. Rather, one common denominator of his appearances is his function to expose the faults of the existing social order. Usually that system is thriving within Gavin himself as much as in society. Gavin's world is one which maintains a defunct moral code as an entity from the past which is both alive and dead. (Like Addie Bundren's body in As I Lay Dying, it is dead but not buried, and certainly still present.) Much has been written of Faulkner's conception of time, most of which can be reduced to the platitude that "the past lives on in the present." This is especially true with the moral code of the Old South, which could long endure after the history had been, for the most part, forgotten. At one point Faulkner said, "There is no such thing as was--only is."¹⁶ This may be true enough, but the

¹⁶James B. Meriwether, Lion in the Garden (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 255.

present decadence is not negated (nor even neutralized) by any lingering realities (historical, moral, or otherwise) from the past. In Intruder in the Dust Faulkner wrote that

. . . yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible. . . .
 Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago. For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags. . . .¹⁷

Putting aside all the timeless though timely double-talk about the Alpha and the Omega, there is a legitimate point here: The past lives on in the present. And it is in the present that Gavin works to reveal the faults of a code from the past which yet control the present. It is not only fourteen-year-olds who are fixated at some glorious point in the Civil War; it is in a sense all Southerners, certainly including Gavin. Again, Faulkner does not develop a moral system through Gavin, but he exposes the decay of an existing one; as he does so Gavin's personal morality develops.

A great part of this development is mere awareness of the faults of the existing system. Like Ike McCaslin, Gavin comes to see and understand the wrong and shame of the Old South's moral order. But unlike Ike, Gavin does not sell his land and go into seclusion in a feeble attempt to relinquish his part of the responsibility; Gavin admirably remains integral to society and reckons with its difficulties. In so doing there is often an inner tension between right and wrong which

¹⁷William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 194.

accounts for the reader's attraction to him. Speaking generally about Faulkner's moral vision, Lawrance Thompson has commented:

When Faulkner says that the only subject worth writing about is the problem of the human heart in conflict with itself, that metaphor implies his own capacity for recognizing that good must be born of evil, man being man, and that evil keeps getting born of good, for the same reason. Faulkner's ambivalent and multivalent vision finds good and evil so inextricably related that they breed their opposites.¹⁸

Gavin, too, perceives and accepts these ideas as he matures morally. He learns foremost that "good" is not merely following the moral code of society. To subscribe to a dead code in many ways breeds only decay. Today, we typically forget that myths may be either true or false. In fact, we generally do not label something "myth" until its acceptance by society is in decline. We have no need to call something a myth until the underlying premises and suppositions, for whatever reasons, have become suspect--until we are trying, like Ike McCaslin, to peel away the "artificialities imposed by society." The moral myths of the Old South were all false from their very inception; their reality in history had been in their being accepted, not in their validity. As Gavin moves from story to story, there is a slow revelation of these things. "The sensitive Southerner . . . is therefore torn between an unshakable allegiance to tradition, and a conviction that the tradition is unjustifiable."¹⁹

¹⁸Lawrance Thompson, William Faulkner (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1963), p. 165.

¹⁹Volpe, p. 255.

But, even so, the tension in Gavin is not quite so neatly explained. In the first place, Gavin's development occurs in both personal and social contexts, and not necessarily at the same speed. Gavin often peels away not only myths of the traditional moral code (Lucas Beauchamp is a Negro and therefore a guilty nigger) but also self-sustained delusions. Second, Faulkner deliberately advanced the complexity of his role as he continually returned to the character. Third, Gavin perhaps sins more as time goes on. By this I mean that as he becomes more and more aware of the decadence around him he is more blemished and involved in it: he does give the fugitive Mink money with which to escape. As he learns of the marriage of heaven and hell and the "ambivalent and multivalent vision [which] finds good and evil so inextricably related that they breed their opposites," he naturally participates in some of that breeding. Fourth, the development from moral agent to moral guide to moral person is gradual, and the division points are not easy to determine except in general terms. Fifth, the legitimacy of what I earlier called "specialized interpretations" must not be discredited; rather, their interrelationships must be rendered consistence with his character as a whole. As Olga Vickery has written,

Faulkner's major concern is not with manipulating his characters nor with documenting the stages in their development. Instead, having granted them their autonomy and having assumed that all men are capable of all things, he has concentrated on exploring and revealing their complexity.²⁰

²⁰Vickery, p. 296.

In a very designed way, Faulkner has manipulated Gavin and has not documented stages of his development. I am taking this task as my own.

The most logical way to delineate this process is to consider it in chronological order. This is not as easy, however, as it might seem for the simple reason that there are two different chronologies. That is, the novels and stories were not written in chronological order, and hence the order in which they were written does not coincide with the way in which Gavin became naturally older and wise year by year. Thus there is one chronology for the order in which Faulkner wrote the novels and stories, and there is another for the order in which Gavin developed as a character in actual life. Consider that these were written and published in the following order:

1931	"Hair"
1932	"Smoke," <u>Light in August</u>
1937	"Monk"
1939	"Hand Upon the Waters"
1940	"Tomorrow"
1942	"Go Down, Moses"
1946	"An Error in Chemistry"
1948	<u>Intruder in the Dust</u>
1949	"Knight's Gambit"
1951	<u>Requiem for a Nun</u>
1957	<u>The Town</u>
1959	<u>The Mansion</u>

For several reasons it is difficult to order these according to Gavin's natural aging process. For one reason The Town and The Mansion, taken together, cover the period 1909-1947. For another, Gavin's age cannot specifically be determined in any of the short stories except "Tomorrow," where we are told in the introduction that he has been county attorney "for more than twenty years" and that he had been twenty-eight at the time of the murder. Third, there are contradictions if we try to piece

together information about Gavin's age in various stories and novels from allusions to events which are fixed in time. This chronology is therefore not totally precise. Appendix I, based on allusions and dates in the fiction, is more detailed and free of significant contradictions.

1918	"Tomorrow"
1909-1927	<u>The Town</u>
1925	"Hand Upon the Waters"
1930	"Hair"
1931	<u>Light in August</u>
ca. 1932	"Smoke"
1936-40	<u>Intruder in the Dust</u>
1938	<u>Requiem for a Nun</u>
ca. 1940	"Go Down, Moses," "An Error in Chemistry," and "Monk"
1942	"Knight's Gambit"
1927-1947	<u>The Mansion</u>

In discussing Gavin's development I will primarily follow the second chronology. In Chapter II I treat all of the eight short stories in which Gavin is a character. In six of these, the collection eventually published as Knight's Gambit, he is the main character; in two others he has a subordinate, yet vital, role. His appearance in "Hair" is important because it is his first one; he also has a part in "Go Down, Moses" and Light in August. Chapters III, IV, V, and VI respectively are devoted to Intruder in the Dust, Requiem for a Nun, The Town, and The Mansion because it seems only sensible to discuss the two Snopes novels one after the other. Chapter VII is the conclusion of my work.

Before proceeding to "Knight's Gambit" and the other short stories, I would like to sketch briefly Faulkner's literary career and place the material in which Gavin appears into this overall framework and context. The scenario usually goes something like this: Faulkner originally saw himself as a poet, and, indeed, he did produce an early volume of second-rate poems. In the mid-20's he went to New Orleans

where he wrote for the Times-Picayune and came under the influence and direction of Sherwood Anderson. In 1926 and 1927 respectively he published his first two novels, Soldier's Pay and Mosquitoes, which were favorably reviewed more often than not. They did not sell, however, and were soon out of print. In 1929 Sartoris, important because it is the first Yoknapatawpha work, appeared, bringing to an end the "early" years of his career. The Sound and the Fury, however, also was finished that year, and with its publication began the "great" era in which he wrote As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (in 1931 and the first commercial success), Light in August (1932), Pylon (in 1935 and the only black sheep of the "great" period), and Absalom, Absalom! (1936). The third period could be called the "success and fame" years, which actually extend to his death in 1962. In the middle of this period, however, appeared Intruder in the Dust (1948) and Requiem for a Nun (1951), which have often been seen as products of some "dark" period in Faulkner's life. It is also generally pointed out that the works written after 1936 are all outgrowths of earlier novels and stories. Much of the criticism of these works (1936 ff.) interprets them in great part as Faulkner's effort to restate, explain, and fulfill themes, plots, and characterizations began earlier. Undoubtedly there is much validity in such comments; however, they have probably been given too much mileage.

Gavin Stevens, then, was a relatively late arrival in Yoknapatawpha County, appearing after the Sartorises in Sartoris and the Compsons in The Sound and the Fury. He should also be considered an early arrival, however, since he was on the scene within five years after Faulkner wrote his first novel. As mentioned earlier, his first role

was in "Hair" in 1931. After this date Faulkner consistently made use of the character--and he made more use of him as time went on. Among Faulkner's last seven works, Gavin is a central figure in five of them; he is a character in all the novels or short story collections after 1942 except A Fable (1954) and The Reivers (1962). Clearly, then, Faulkner was significantly attracted to the character for the last twenty years of his thirty-five year career. Gavin Stevens is easily Faulkner's most ubiquitous character,"²¹ and as such he is an integral part of a canon, a character consistent within himself and to the various roles he plays.

²¹Dorothy Tuck, Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), p. 222.

CHAPTER II

KNIGHT'S GAMBIT AND OTHER STORIES

"How did just years do all that?"

"They made me older," his uncle said. "I have improved."

--Knight's Gambit, p. 246

Faulkner concludes Knight's Gambit by having Gavin Stevens himself pronounce the improvement of his own character. Neither Gavin nor Faulkner, however, makes explicit the points, methods, or process of this improvement; these must be deduced and interpreted from the stories which comprise the work. Specifically, Gavin moves from smartness to wisdom, from legal justice to moral justice, and, in literary terms, from being a one-dimensional figure to living as a multifaceted character.

In the above passage Gavin is referring to the twenty years of his life preceding his marriage to Melisandre Backus Harriss in 1942. The mention of "twenty years," however, functions in another respect, too, for these stories were written over a period of some twenty years. "Knight's Gambit," which was written much later than the earlier ones, is noticeably longer, has more thematic substance, and displays more of Gavin's improvement. In writing "Knight's Gambit" (in order to publish Knight's Gambit) Faulkner followed the same structural format that occurs in Go Down, Moses and The Unvanquished. That is, he collected a series of stories loosely connected by characters and themes into book-length pieces of fiction which are not quite novels. In Knight's Gambit these characters are Gavin Stevens, himself the center of all six stories,

and his nephew Chick Mallison, who narrates three of these and is a character in a fourth one. The context of the plots is basically the same throughout, since all are murder stories except "Knight's Gambit" itself, which has only a near-murder.

I shall begin by discussing the first five stories of Knight's Gambit; these are treated in the order in which they were written. I will then examine three miscellaneous appearances of Gavin in other works. In 1949, when Knight's Gambit was published, "Hair" was not included for two reasons: it is not a murder story and Gavin is not a main character. "Go Down, Moses" was not included obviously because it served the same structural function for Go Down, Moses (where it had previously been published) as "Knight's Gambit" did for Knight's Gambit. In addition, Gavin also has a walk-on part in Light in August. I have chosen to discuss these after the first five stories of Knight's Gambit because it is sensible to relate these miscellaneous appearances to the established context of the stories in the collection. I have placed "Knight's Gambit" itself at the end because it is a substantive culmination of the earlier fiction. By this I mean not only that the work is longer, but also that it is a much more refined story than the others, and thereby deserves more attention.

Criticism of these stories is sparse indeed. Edmond Volpe does not deal with any of them in his Reader's Guide; Dorothy Tuck in the Crowell Handbook treats each of them in two or three sentences ("Knight's Gambit" itself is reviewed in a couple of paragraphs); and Olga Vickery in The Novels of William Faulkner (probably the single most important criticism of the canon) scarcely mentions the stories or Gavin's role

in them. Generally, these stories, when discussed at all, are dealt with only in passing. Perhaps the reason for such minimal, cursory treatment is the pervasive attitude that they are mere detective stories, shallow and unworthy of much attention. The typical view has been succinctly expressed by Judith Bryant Wittenberg: "Knight's Gambit as a whole has, in fact, little import beyond its curiosity value as Faulkner's tribute to a genre [the detective story] which provided much of his leisure reading."²² Faulkner himself (according to letters he wrote his publishers) could, in 1949 when writing "Knight's Gambit," only vaguely remember the earlier stories. Evidently he could not recall some of their titles, dates, or the magazines in which they were published.²³ Perhaps twenty years was longer to Faulkner than to Gavin. When writing the final chapter, however, Faulkner evidently reviewed the earlier stories in order to insure consistency in theme and character--both Gavin's and Chick's. This consistency and improvement will be my focal point; certainly the stories, except for "Knight's Gambit," are mere detective puzzles and undeserving of any more attention than they have been given. Only one critic, Michael Millgate, has asserted that they are any more than this:

. . . there seems little doubt that the stories in Knight's Gambit must be seen primarily as a series of more or less deliberate exercises on the way to Faulkner's final conception and characterization of Gavin Stevens.²⁴

²²Judith Bryant Wittenberg, Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 216.

²³Joseph Blotner, Ed., Selected Letters of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 275, 283, 287.

²⁴Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 267.

I will not go this far--that is, I would have it that they are a series of detective stories which contain much of Gavin's development, but their purpose is not to arrive at a "final conception" of this man; this does not occur until The Town and The Mansion.

Generally speaking, Faulkner originally conceived Gavin Stevens as a lawyer-detective. In fact, some of these early stories were entered in contests for mystery magazines. In his original role Gavin is something of a cross between Perry Mason and Sherlock Holmes; he is little more than a lawyer-detective with a good heart. He is basically occupied only with the intrigue of solving various murders, and for the most part moral concerns do not influence his efforts for solutions. From story to story, however, there is more and more evidence for such moral involvement. In 1948, when the author decided to expand the first version of "Knight's Gambit" and to submit all six of the stories for publication in a single volume, he wrote in a letter to his editor, Saxe Commins:

I am thinking of a "Gavin Stevens" volume, more or less detective stories. I have four or five short pieces, averaging twenty pages, in which Stevens solves or prevents crime to protect the weak, right injustice, or punish evil. There is one more ["Knight's Gambit"] which no one has bought. The reason is, it is a novel which I tried to compress into short story length. It is a love story, in which Stevens prevents a crime (murder) not for justice but to gain (he is now fifty plus) the childhood sweetheart which he lost twenty years ago.²⁵

Faulkner's assertion here, that Gavin not only solves crimes but works to "protect the weak, right injustice, or punish evil, is significant.

²⁵Joseph Blotner, Ed., Selected Letters of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 280.

As time went on, the original function of Gavin as mere lawyer-detective virtually disappeared, and these initially secondary concerns came firmly to control his character.

These efforts are easily discernible in "Smoke," the earliest story in the collection. Gavin is not merely content to solve the murders of Anse Holland and Judge Dukinfield--he also works to protect Young Anse from his mistaken confession that he murdered his father, to right the injustices of Old Anse's will, and to punish Granby Dodge, evil culprit. The plot of the story is centered around the unraveling of the murders, but this alone does not account for Gavin's behavior in the courtroom. Gavin is never simply and entirely motivated only by the desire to solve the crimes. He is at every point interested in perceiving the reasons for which people act. His ability to do this actually permits him to solve the crimes. (By the time of the Snopes trilogy this function falters and is relinquished to Ratliff.) Therefore he is not only able to explain why the two brothers, Anse and Virginius, did not murder their father as he violated their mother's grave, but he also knows why Granby Dodge, cousin to Young Anse and Virginius, did.

Interestingly enough, the reader of "Smoke" is never filled in on many of the details of the two murders. We are gradually told who is guilty and responsible, but the plot is never fully explained. Evidently, the happenings occurred something like this: Young Anse caught his father digging up graves in the family plot and beat him nearly to death. Granby Dodge, then, having either secretly witnessed the event or happening by the grave sites shortly thereafter, finished off Old Anse's death and made it appear that his horse had been respon-

ible. Granby killed him because he wanted Virginus to inherit the two-thousand acre farm. (Granby, by nature an evil culprit, had himself secured a "partnership will" with Virginus; presumably, as Gavin later indicates, he had intended to poison Virginus and thus become sole owner of the farm.) Shortly after Old Anse's death, however, Granby realized that Judge Dukinfield had once owned the horse thought to have caused Old Anse's death. Granby therefore hired a man from Memphis to come to Jefferson and murder the judge before he could invalidate Old Anse's will, thereby leaving the land to Virginus. Gavin, alone, was able to decipher all of this by piecing together several bits of seemingly unrelated information. Gavin's figuring it out, however, is not the total display of his intelligence and ability to read human character and motivation. He also succeeds (through a dramatic ploy with a smoke-filled box) at tricking Granby into implicating himself.

Gavin functions morally in two important ways: First, he more or less absolves Young Anse from the murder of his father--this, when it is clear that he has beaten his father to the point that he later thinks he had actually murdered him. Second, Gavin works with the two brothers to insure between them a just division of land--this, when Virginus alone is legally entitled to all of it. Thus, even in the beginning Faulkner made something more of Gavin than a mere sleuth. Had Poe or Doyle or Gardner written this story, these moral elements would not have been included.

In the next story, "Monk," Gavin is again concerned primarily with morality and human motivation. On the one hand he realizes that Monk had not committed the murder for which he is imprisoned; on the

other hand he discovers why Monk did shoot the warden and is still not guilty of murder. Moreover, he makes such a discovery in the manifestly corrupt moral environment of the governor and his pardon board. As in "Smoke," Gavin's purpose is to understand why people act as they do. In so doing it is clear that the governor, ostensibly in charge of administering justice throughout the state, is far more despicable than Terrel, a murderer of at least two men, but who can sincerely claim, "I just want justice. That's all."²⁶ Toward the end of the story

Gavin convinces the governor of Terrel's actual guilt, but it is a guilt not punishable by law, so Terrel goes free. Held symmetrical, outside the flesh, the law is pathetically inapplicable to Terrel's situation, for it can deal only with technical, not actual, guilt.²⁷

Faulkner is clearly aware of the distinction between technical and actual guilt, but this is not quite his focus here. The problem is that the governor, hoping to secure votes in the coming election, proceeds to free Terrell anyway. His comment to Gavin is: "As I said before, if we let him out and he murders again, as he probably will, he can always come back here." (54) Faulkner is indicting the governor for ignoring both the technical and actual guilt of Terrel's first murder in addition to the actual, though not technical, guilt in the second one.

²⁶William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 57. (Hereafter, all references from Knight's Gambit are parenthetically indicated.)

²⁷Panthea Reid Broughton, William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 88.

Gavin's personal involvement with Monk, Terrel, and the governor could be explained and dismissed as idle curiosity on his part. Certainly neither Gavin nor society itself has anything to gain from proving that Monk was innocent. It is, rather, out of a sense of justice that Gavin secures the pardon for Monk and pursues the facts of the warden's murder. Most individuals, even county attorneys, would let sleeping dogs lie--on both counts. Monk has nothing to contribute to Jefferson and his predicament is actually none of Gavin's business. I would argue, however, that it is to Gavin's credit that he works to "protect the weak, right injustice, or punish evil," even though on all three points he is ineffectual in "Monk." Monk Odlethorp is not protected, the injustice of the governor remains undetected and unexposed (except by Gavin); and the evil of Terrel's second murder is not punished. When Chick says that "nobody except my Uncle Gavin seemed to be concerned about Monk," (46) it is more of a comment about society's lack of concern than about Gavin's undue concern. One of the ironies is that the reader, too, remains basically unconcerned about Monk, who has emerged "as a repulsive yet also a pathetic figure."²⁸ Faulkner is here using both Monk and Gavin as weapons in his attack upon something rotten in Jackson. Thus, as Michael Millgate has observed, "Stevens's detective work provides an opportunity for an attack upon the cynical manipulation of human lives for sordid political ends, but its relation to Monk and his fate seems extremely tangential."²⁹

²⁸Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 226.

²⁹Ibid.

"Hand Upon the Waters" is the weakest story in the collection. As a detective story it can scarcely be considered even second-rate; there is no build-up of suspense or red herring in the plot or (even superficial) challenge to the reader. The progression of the plot is too straightforward and simplistic. If the story succeeds at all, it is due to the shock effect of the ending: that Lonnie Grinnup's idiot sidekick could have avenged Grinnup's death by killing Boyd Ballenbaugh and baiting the trotline with him.

Gavin's character, though, is consistent with those descriptions already offered. He again meddles in something which he acknowledges is none of his business in an attempt to expose a murder and thereby right an injustice. (65) On this occasion he does so knowing very well that he is risking his life. Also, he is again the shrewd, calculating know-it-all who is the only person around to realize that one does not use a paddle to run a trotline.

"Hand Upon the Waters," coming after "Monk," is no great step forward in Gavin's character development. The story is not set in a perfect moral vacuum, however, for Gavin is involved with moral questions on two occasions. Consider Tyler's argument to Gavin that he should not be exposed:

"Hush," Tyler said. He spoke almost gently, looking at Stevens with the pale eyes in which there was absolutely nothing. "You can't do that. It's a good name. Has been. Maybe nobody's done much for it yet, but nobody's hurt it bad yet, up to now. I have owed no man, I have taken nothing that was not mine. You mustn't do that, Gavin."

"I mustn't do anything else, Tyler."

The other looked at him. Stevens heard him draw a long breath and expel it. But his face did not change at all. "You want your eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth."

"Justice wants it. Maybe Lonnie Grinnup wants it. "Wouldn't you?"

Gavin's answer that "justice wants it" should not be viewed as some sort of shallow cliché. Gavin makes this statement in the face of death, knowing that the Ballenbaughs are armed murderers who will probably kill him as a result.

The second instance of Gavin's involvement with morality is important because it is the first time we see him tell a lie. In fact, he tells the same lie twice without blinking and without hesitation. Near the end of the story, when the sheriff asks Gavin how Boyd got on the trotline, Gavin says he does not know, when clearly he does. Gavin's lie can only be interpreted as his attempt to protect Joe, Lonnie Grinnup's idiot boy, who of course made fish bait out of Boyd. In this way Gavin, again, works to "protect the weak."

In "Tomorrow" there is never any question about who commits the murder; Mr. Bookwright himself simply makes the announcement to the justice of the peace. It all seems to be a cut-and-dried affair, hopelessly uneventful, until Jackson Fentry hangs the jury by refusing to free Bookwright with his vote. From the offset the intrigue is clearly not "who done it" but why the juror votes as he does. To all concerned it is evident that young Thorpe deserved to be shot; and, moreover, that the circumstances permit them to "vote Bookwright free." Even Fentry recognizes that his vote is only a token one because at the retrial Bookwright will surely be found not guilty.

Faulkner unfolds the events of Fentry's history so as to further define Gavin's character. Early in the story Gavin commits his first undeniably unethical act; he sends young Chick to spy on the jury to learn who is holding up the anticipated verdict. Gavin more or less

puts himself above ethics and the law when he tells Chick: "This is not cricket. . . . But justice is accomplished lots of times by methods that won't bear looking at," (89) Thus he knows to seek out Jackson Fentry in order to find out why he did not win the case. He immediately drives thirty miles to unravel the motivation of this man's conduct. In this case there is no question about the legitimacy of Gavin's curiosity; both the Pruitts and Isham Quick have expected his arrival and are eager to assume positions as narrators (and informers) in order to help him. At one point Chick, in explaining the Pruitts's eagerness to help Gavin, says: "It was as if people looked at his face and knew that what he asked was not just for his own curiosity or his own selfish using." (91) Neither the Pruitts nor Quick, however, knows the complete story, which Gavin must piece together for himself and Chick.

Once again, as in "Smoke," Faulkner does not make explicit the full details of the plot, but leaves much to be slowly figured out by the reader. Primarily, we are never told that Buck Thorpe had once been called Jackson and Longstreet Fentry; this is only implied. Similarly, the relationships among the Fentrys, Bookwrights, Thorpes, Pruitts, and with Isham Quick must be pieced together as the three narrators tell their parts of the story. The thread of the plot is actually rather simplistic: Fentry will not vote to free Bookwright, who has shot Buck Thorpe while he was attempting to elope with Bookwright's daughter (a perfectly defensible action on Bookwright's part, since he is acting to preserve the moral code of the Old South which required the protection of a woman's virtue). At the time of the trial only Fentry knows that young Thorpe was the person whom he had nourished on goat's milk and

otherwise cared for during the first few years of his life. To give this plot credibility, Faulkner logically separates the characters in time and distance. Isham Quick, the Thorpes, and Jackson Fentry all live in separate communities miles apart; too, Fentry's motivation for not freeing Bookwright goes back some twenty years to the time when Buck Thorpe was born. It is all forgotten history to everyone except Fentry; even Isham Quick does not make the connection between Jackson and Longstreet Fentry and Buck Thorpe until the trial is over.

In addition to Gavin and Chick's "unprofessional spying," the story exhibits other moral concerns. As Isham Quick narrates his part of the story, Faulkner has him say repeatedly that "it's the law." The statement comes almost to function as a choral refrain as everyone, especially Gavin, comes to see the difference between legal justice and moral justice. It's the law that permits the Thorpe family to claim Jackson and Longstreet Fentry as their own because of the legal blood kinship. Thus, it is the law itself which transforms him from Jackson and Longstreet Fentry into "Bucksnoort," fit to kill. Later, Jackson Fentry as juror will defeat both legal and moral justice when he has his moment of symbolic revenge by not voting to free Bookwright. Fentry's vote is against the established system and order of the law itself more than it is against Bookwright, whom he has never seen before.

Faulkner ends the story with another of Gavin's moral pronouncements to young Chick:

"Of course he wasn't," "Uncle Gavin said. "The lowly and invincible of the earth--to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free."

"I would have," I said, "I would have freed him. Because Buck Thorpe was bad. He----"

"No, you wouldn't," Uncle Gavin said. . . "It wasn't Buck Thorpe, the adult, the man. He would have shot that man as quick as Bookwright did, if he had been in Bookwright's place. It was because somewhere in that debased and brutalized flesh which Bookwright slew there still remained, not the spirit maybe, but at least the memory, of that little boy, that Jackson and Longstreet Fentry, even though the man the boy had become didn't know it, and only Fentry did. And you wouldn't have freed him either. Don't ever forget that. Never."

(104-105)

Gavin realizes that legal justice has not been just, but even this is not the primary point. Gavin has become more than merely understanding of and sympathetic with Fentry's vote; it is almost as though he has come to appreciate it as a moral act. When the Thorpe family and the law had come to claim Jackson and Longstreet Fentry as their own, Fentry himself had been helpless against legal authorities. Twenty years later, Jackson is still helpless against the legal system, but as juror he at least endures as best he can. Thus, today has become yesterday's tomorrow, and yesterday's legal injustice remains as wrong and unrectifiable as ever. There is another point, however, paired with this one: that the "lowly and invincible of the earth" shall continue to endure. Jackson Fentry's vote will not prevail; its only accomplishment, except in so far as it is a moral act, will be to force the legal system to conduct a retrial with another jury. The fact that "you wouldn't have freed him either. . . Never" is a sentiment and moral reality which will prevail among good and just persons. When Gavin tells Chick that he would never vote Bookwright free under similar conditions, he is admitting that he himself would have cast the same vote.

Gavin's role in "An Error in Chemistry" is hardly weighty in the moral realm. The story itself was written for one reason: to win the First Annual Detective Short Story Contest of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. The story placed second out of 838 entries and Faulkner received \$500 for it.³⁰ It is a first rate detective story, and similar to "Smoke" in that Gavin is basically a one-dimensional lawyer-detective. The author again does not make explicit all the details of the plot, but leaves many important parts to be deciphered by the reader.

The revelation of the culprit occurs in an accidental fashion when Flint, the murderer, blunders by placing sugar directly into whiskey rather than first into water as he mixes drinks. It is such an impossible mistake that all present, even Chick, immediately recognize that Flint must be an imposter, since no Southerner could thinkably be so careless with good whiskey when mixing a cold toddy. Prior to this, however, Gavin has been the only person around to remain suspicious of the circumstances surrounding the death of Pritchel's daughter. He maintains over and over again that all the addends simply do not "add up." The solution occurs when Flint blunders, and not through any trickery by Gavin, as in "Smoke," "Monk," and "Hand Upon the Waters." It is again Gavin who sees Flint's motivation and is able to explain his actions for us. As a matter of fact, the conclusion of the story nearly transforms its theme if not its plot from the detective genre into something higher:

³⁰Dorothy Tuck, Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1964), p. 113.



"What else could the possession of such a gift as his [Flint's] have engendered, and the successful practising of it have increased, but a supreme contempt for mankind? You told me yourself that he had never been afraid in his life."

"Yes," the sheriff said. "The Book itself says somewhere, Know thyself. Ain't there another book somewhere that says, Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride? You ought to know; you claim to be a book man. Didn't you tell me that's what that luck-charm on your watch chain means? What book is that in?"

"It's in all of them," Uncle Gavin said. "The good ones, I mean. It's said in a lot of different ways, but it's there."

(131)

Ironically, it appears that Faulkner felt compelled to tack on this moral altruism to his ending not so much to finish the story, but to insure that the story was a "good one" because it contains the passage "Know thyself. . . ." Certainly this message is nowhere in the story. As in "Smoke," Faulkner was not content to write a simple detective story; the moral elements have been included.

Gavin also understands Flint's motivation. The masquerade artist's "supreme contempt for mankind" has been the true source of the two murders, not greed for money or the clay-ridden property. This is quite an accomplishment, given the fact that the character is not even a character; that is, Gavin never meets Flint, the impersonator Signor Canova, except in the guise of Old Man Pritchel or as his son-in-law. Thus the plot is successfully revealed in the central mystery elements of the story, yet the theme ("Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride") is embodied in a different realm. This moral sentiment, of course, is specific enough to have application to Flint, who through his ability to "be" anybody "is" no one, yet general enough to apply to anyone, including Gavin and Chick. As Michael Millgate has commented, "The element of moral intention involved here is directly

related to the developing presentation of Gavin Stevens."³¹ Gavin, too, is subject to arrogance and vanity and pride, as perpetually manifested by the Phi Beta Kappa key dangling from his watch chain. The "moral intention" here will later be connected to "Knight's Gambit," but first I wish to discuss the three miscellaneous appearances which Gavin makes in other works by Faulkner.

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The name Gavin Stevens first appeared in print in American Mercury magazine, May, 1931, in a story titled "Hair." Gavin is not a central figure of the work, although he does play the part of the shrewd observer who knows and understands what is going on. Faulkner's first published description of him reads as follows:

Sometimes I [the traveling salesman who is narrator] would tell them. But I never told anybody except Gavin Stevens. He is the district attorney, a smart man: not like the usual pedagogue lawyer and office holder. He went to Harvard, and when my health broke down (I used to be a bookkeeper in a Gordonville bank and my health broke down and I met Stevens on a Memphis train when I was coming home from the hospital) it was him that suggested I try the road and got me my position with this company.³²

As I said, Gavin's role in "Hair" is not primarily significant except that he ends the story when he informs the traveling salesman-narrator (obviously a forerunner to Ratliff in the Snopes trilogy) that Hawkshaw has married Susa Reed. Many of the character's traits and functions,

³¹Millgate, p. 268.

³²William Faulkner, "Hair," in Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 144.

however, can be identified in his role here. First, we are told that he is a "district attorney" (in other early stories he is "county attorney") of a different breed; that is, he is not "the usual pedagogue lawyer." Second, he is described as a "smart man," who went to Harvard. Third, he helps others when he really does not have to; in particular, he has helped the salesman to secure his job. Fourth, Gavin speculates about and interprets human behavior and motivation; specifically, he explains why Hawkshaw has paid off the Starnes's mortgage and has married the Reed girl. Fifth, Gavin's ability to have the last word in a dialogue occurs here in two or three places; later he acts in the same way in conversations with Chick, Ratliff, and others. Sixth, he functions as a confidant.

Many critics, especially early ones, have seen Gavin Stevens as an incarnation in print of Phil Stone, Faulkner's friend and sometime mentor. Indeed there are a number of similarities. Both are lawyers who were graduated from Ivy League schools (Gavin went to Harvard and Phil went to Yale); both are approximately the same age (Phil was born in 1893 and Gavin, at least as rendered in "Knight's Gambit," was born in 1890); both talk entirely too much (Phil had a reputation for his loquaciousness throughout Oxford, as did Gavin in Jefferson); both have an interest in classical literature and read Greek and Latin.

It seems clear enough that Faulkner at least had Phil in mind when he created Gavin, but anything more than this becomes speculation rather than interpretation. Gavin is a character in his own right, although he occasionally borrows Phil Stone's suit. "Hair" is one

place where this happens to be true. And, as in other places, it neither particularly adds to nor subtracts from his place in Faulkner's literature.

Gavin also appears in Phil Stone's attire in Light in August. His function here is to give a long-winded speech in the fashion attributed to the Oxford lawyer. Critics writing of his brief role here have usually dealt with what he says. As Judith Wittenberg has commented, "Some early critics [discussing Light in August] called Stevens a Faulknerian spokesman, thus finding grounds for denouncing the fiction in which he appears as propaganda."³³ It is not clear why critics have wanted to make Gavin a "Faulknerian spokesman" in this work, since the contents of the speech really are not appropriate to the function of a spokesman. His comments can be divided into three main parts, none of which are controversial or propagandistic. First, he speculates to his professor friend about the thoughts and motivations of Doc and Mrs. Hines, grandparents of Joe Christmas; second, he makes a thematic connection between the birth of Christmas and the birth of Lena Grove's child; third, he attempts to explain why Christmas runs away and supinely permits Percy Grimm to shoot him. Moreover, in all instances his comments are entirely conjectural, and no one could mistake them for anything else.

To me, however, the interesting aspect of Gavin's appearance here is not what he says but that he is present at all: Why did Faulkner choose to more or less "insert" Gavin into his longest novel?

³³Wittenberg, p. 213.

His presence is not required by any nuance of the theme or plot. Also, he exits as quickly as he appears and is not mentioned again in the book. My explanation is that Faulkner at this particular point of the narration wanted to tie up some loose threads before describing the murder of Christmas. In particular, those threads were the items mentioned above: he wanted to say good-bye to Doc and Mrs. Hines after explaining their part in Christmas's death; to connect the birth (and death) of Christmas to the Lena Grove/Byron Bunch segment of the story; and to offer some explanation for Christmas's death in terms of that character's racial identity (or, more precisely, the lack of it). There truly is no other character in the work, major or minor, with the intellect and insight into human nature who could complete the items on this list. Gavin, however, who had recently been created for just such a purpose in "Hair," was available and was therefore incorporated into the narrative.

On all of these points Gavin has fared well with the critics except the last one. Consider a comment by Francois Pitavy:

. . . the intellectual, the Harvard alumnus, Gavin Stevens, seeks to give a rational account of Joe's conduct. Yet, in spite of its brilliance, his theory of the alternating influence of white and Negro blood sheds no light on Christmas's last moments and is meaningless in the face of his tragedy. It strikes the reader as an arbitrary explanation, especially in the end. What is more, it is ironic that Gavin confidently assumes that Christmas is actually of mixed race, although Faulkner's consummate artistry has always left this doubtful.³⁴

³⁴Francois Pitavy, Faulkner's Light in August, trans. by Gillian E. Cook (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 30.

Similar arguments have been put forth by Olga Vickery,³⁵ Edmond Volpe,³⁶ and others. I do not want to take issue too harshly with this explanation of Gavin's comments, but I think Gavin has been unjustly faulted. Why shouldn't Gavin "assume that Christmas is actually of mixed race"? Joe Christmas himself has for the most part accepted it as fact for thirty-six years--at least he has lived his life as if it is true. Gavin's role in Light in August is appropriate for him, and would not be fitting to any other character in the work. The brevity does not distract from the validity of his explanations, although it does preclude any evidence of development on his own part.

Exactly ten years after Faulkner published Light in August, he published "Go Down, Moses." The story itself was written two years earlier in 1940, coming after "Hair," Light in August, "Smoke," "Monk," and "Hand Upon the Waters." It was written approximately at the same time as "Tomorrow"; consequently, Gavin's development is well under way and is evident in the story in several respects. His role here, incidentally, is similar to the one in the novel just discussed. In both instances he helps to return home the body of a dead murderer and consoles the grandmothers of both Joe Christmas and Butch Beauchamp; he explains the behavior and motivations of both the grandmothers and their grandsons; and both incidents occur at train stations. In a subtle and indirect fashion, though not an unconscious one, Faulkner

³⁵Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 73

³⁶Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Octagon Books, 1964), p. 154.

revisited the Gavin Stevens episode of Light in August when he wrote "Go Down, Moses." In this latter story, however, Gavin is operating in a moral context; and, as I said, his development is under way.

In "Go Down, Moses" Gavin makes his first significant and memorable mistake. When he plays the part of the white do-gooder by collecting money to bring home the body of Butch Beauchamp for burial, he is performing an admirable, respectable, well-intentioned and well-received deed. When he shows up, however, at the Worsham house to grieve superficially with Mollie Beauchamp and other relatives (and probably to accept thanks from the grateful and beholding "niggers"), he is not only socially out of place but morally dislocated. He rather quickly excuses himself with feeble apologies and literally runs as he makes his exit. "Go Down, Moses" is not "Go Down, Gavin"; Gavin, in many respects a manifest embodiment of Southern white culture, is not fit to free the socially enslaved. Moreover, ironically, the one person he does deliver from Egypt (Butch Beauchamp via Joliet, Illinois) is already dead. When Gavin experiences this realization the result is not only embarrassment, but humiliation and defeat. It is in this story that Gavin first begins to consider his own behavior and motivations, and, more importantly, his faults. Thus Gavin eventually understands why Mollie wants her grandson brought home in a becoming fashion, replete with flowers, a procession, and a hearse; he also realizes why she wants it all put in the newspaper. But this is not the entire story; in fact, a good case can be made that it is not Mollie's story at all, but Gavin's. Gavin is unquestionably the central character although he is not always the center of attention.

Gavin's behavior at Miss Worsham's house, however, is not totally reprehensible. When he recognizes the inappropriateness of his coming there he immediately says,

"I'd better go," . . . He rose quickly. Miss Worsham rose too, but he did not wait for her to precede him. He went down the hall fast, almost running; he did not even know whether she was following him or not. Soon I will be outside, he thought. Then there will be air, space, breath.³⁷

Ironically, it is Gavin who needs his freedom; he, too, has been metaphorically sold into Egypt for a few brief minutes. He realizes that he has sold himself; and, moreover, he can provide his own escape; "I'm sorry," Stevens said. "I ask you to forgive me. I should have known. I shouldn't have come."³⁸ Gavin does the only genteel thing possible. He makes a quick and sincere apology in which he not only asks forgiveness but admits his error. This much, at least, is to his credit.

At the end of the story another question is posed. When Faulkner describes Gavin as "the designated paladin of justice and truth and right, the Heidelberg Ph. D."³⁹ he is displaying contempt, but it is a sympathetic contempt. The last line of the story is poken by Gavin, who says, "Come on. . . . Let's get back to town. I haven't seen my desk in two days."⁴⁰ Obviously, this is a retreat. For the second time in the story Gavin excuses himself to go home. The question is whether he is returning to town to think about his actions or to escape thinking

³⁷William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York: Random House:, 1942), pp. 380-381.

³⁸Ibid, p. 381.

³⁹Ibid, p. 382.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 383.

about them. We have no way of knowing, of course, but I would suggest that he does a tremendous amount of thinking about racial problems and personal faults between "Go Down, Moses" (1942) and Intruder in the Dust (1948).

For the sake of completeness in discussing the miscellaneous appearances of Gavin, I must include that he is alluded to in one other story, "The Tall Men," published in 1941:

. . . I remember how in that second winter Buddy come to town one day to see Lawyer Gavin Stevens. Not for legal advice how to sue the Government or somebody into buying the cotton, even if they never had no card for it, but just to find out why.⁴¹

Gavin's part here is virtually inconsequential, except that once again it is Gavin who is called upon to explain "why." Undoubtedly, he does.

In Chapter I, I said that there are no instances where Gavin can legitimately be called a "detached observer." At this point I must qualify myself in a minor way, since Gavin does serve such a role in "Hair" and Light in August. In these two works he is not involved in the action or plots--all he does is watch and explain. Gavin, however, has not been called a "detached observer" in connection with these two works; but in others, where it is truly not the case. In a sense, then, "detached observer" is the first role Gavin is called upon to play, occurring in the first two places where he is a character. His role as "observer" never really disappears, but the "detached" is permanently gone by 1932. All in all, Gavin's character in these sundry appearances is precisely consistent with his character in Knight's Gambit.

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⁴¹William Faulkner, "The Tall Men," in Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1950), pp. 56-57.

The final version of "Knight's Gambit" was written in 1949, a year after Intruder in the Dust. Gavin's role, however, in this story is much more akin to his role in the earlier stories than to his part in the novel. Gavin is still serving many of the previously identified functions. For example, he is still an observer and explainer of human behavior; he is definitely still the all-knowing lawyer-detective; and he is loquacious. In Intruder in the Dust, only the last of these is true.

In the opening paragraph of this chapter I asserted that in "Knight's Gambit" Gavin moved from smartness to wisdom, from legal to moral justice, and from being a one-dimensional figure to a multifaceted person. I will now explain, in turn, each of these developments.

In "Knight's Gambit" Gavin's smartness is still as much in play as ever. He is always at least two steps ahead of Hence Cayley, Max Harriss and his sister--and one step ahead of Captain Gualdres and Chick. Gavin, however, is not only alert to their thoughts and actions, but he is wise in dealing with them; it is not through Gavin's cunning that all the threads of the plot are finally, and safely, tied up, but through the wisdom of his maneuvering. Thus, the Captain's death is circumvented, and both he and Max join the military where they will, perhaps, grow up. Some application of these terms may also be made to Gavin's decision to marry Melisandre Harriss. Twenty years earlier, he had escaped marrying her (when they were betrothed at his instigation) through a smart ploy with two letters (one to her and one to his German mistress, and each placed in the wrong envelope). At fifty, however, he wisely decides to "save the queen and let the castle go."

In so far as justice is concerned, Gavin also becomes not only older but wiser, too. In "Tomorrow," Gavin had come to recognize that because "it's the law" did not necessarily mean that "it's the right." When Max Harriss, in an early section of the story, says to Gavin: "You're the Law here, aren't you?" (137), Gavin neatly evades the question. He knows that being "the Law" is not by definition something good. Later, though, Gavin takes it upon himself to become "the Law"--and not just County Attorney. When he decides not to prosecute Max for attempted murder provided that he enlist in the military, he has taken upon himself all functions of the jury, judge, and executioner. Gavin realizes the harsh mistakes of youth and deals with them in such a way as to provide moral, rather than legal, justice. Max can now go away and grow up, and serve his country in a meaningful capacity at the same time.

Similarly, Gavin has almost escaped the bonds of his original lawyer-detective role. True, he is still County Attorney and he yet "detects" and prevents the attempted murder of Captain Gualdres. But as he does so he is not enacting a stream-lined role. We are concerned with him as a person whose experiences and character are interesting in their own right. Gavin no longer works simply to explain the motivations of others, but his own psychological quirks become intriguing matters for the careful reader to discern. We wonder, for example, at his attempts to keep tabs on Max at the Greenbury Hotel in Memphis, at his lengthy and seemingly unnecessary narration of Melisandre's family history, and at numerous puzzling comments. The all-encompassing explanation of his behavior, however, does not become apparent until the

very end, when we, like Chick, learn of his marriage and therefore of the truly personal nature of his interest in Melisandre. In all cases, we cannot merely assume that Gavin acts as he does simply because he is a lawyer-detective, as has been true in many of the earlier stories. In fact, such a presumption, applied here, would explain very little of his behavior.

"Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride" was the theme of "Tomorrow." I will venture to say that it is the most important lesson Gavin learns in all of these ten stories. "Knight's Gambit" is in many respects more of a love story than a detective mystery. (See the quotation from Faulkner's letter on page 23.) This element of love, finally, is necessary to comprehend because Gavin's role and conduct must be explained primarily in terms of his feelings for Melisandre. (Interestingly enough, we are never told that he loves her--either in 1919 or in 1941--but only that he wants to marry her.) He maneuvers events and keeps peace among Captain Gualdres, Hence Cayley, Max Harriss and his sister not because he is County Attorney, but because of his interest in the "queen." It is on this level that Gavin's arrogance and vanity and pride are at once partially defeated, yet maintained.

When Chick first hears Gavin's story of the two mis-mailed letters, he believes it. But when he returns from training his belief in the story has evidently dissolved, and Gavin sidesteps the question in such a way as to confirm Chick's suspicion that the mistake was a conscious one. (243) Gavin is at least dealing with the truth of his earlier actions; and, even at this late date, he accomplishes a reversal.

of the jilting. Thus, Gavin's personal "arrogance and vanity and pride" are evident in at least three ways: (1.) Vanity has provided for the original betrothal, where a thirty-year-old man proposes to a sixteen-year-old girl whom he scarcely knows. (2.) Arrogance has been the reason for his letters to end the misbegotten situation. (3.) Finally, pride, working on him twenty years later, causes him to marry her at last. At this point Gavin is yet subject to these weaknesses of human nature, but he is at least aware of them and his own susceptibility.

In this chapter I have spoken very little about Gavin's relation to the moral code of the Old South, and for one good reason: he is yet at peace with it during this first stage of his development. As a matter of fact, he embraces it on more than one occasion. Consider, for example, his speech to Bookwright's jury in "Tomorrow":

"All of us in this country, the South, have been taught from birth a few things which we hold to above all else. One of the first of these. . . . And that's what I am talking about--not about the dead man and his character and the morality of the act he was engaged in, . . . but about us who are not dead and what we don't know--about all of us, human beings who at bottom want to do right, want not to harm others; human beings with all the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs. . . ."

(87)

At this point Gavin calls upon all of the "human beings who at bottom want to do right" to subscribe to the moral code of doing what they have been taught, as Southerners, from birth. Gavin does not yet see any difference between what is right and what is Southern. In these first appearances Gavin is always laboring not only as a product of the code, but also as its protector. With "Knight's Gambit," however, he leaves such a smug perspective behind, for it comes fully under fire in Intruder in the Dust.

Gavin, here, as I explained in the first chapter, is essentially a moral agent, "an honest and decent man acting to protect and enhance goodness and social stability." As detective and County Attorney, he works on the side of goodness in a linear, one-directional fashion. He is not yet a moral guide, even to young Chick, although this function is easily discernible on occasions (such as in the conclusion of "Tomorrow," and in some of his passing remarks to him). He is also somewhat of a moral person, "deciding between right and wrong in his own life." Obviously, there is some overlapping of terms, since it is necessary for one to be a moral person before he can be a guide or agent. Faulkner, however, as it happened, did not intermingle these functions too often; but, generally speaking, kept them separate. In all of these stories Gavin works to serve goodness. He helps to "protect the weak, right injustice, or punish evil." In this first stage of his development Gavin himself is never weak, unjust, or evil. But he will become each of these in varying degrees as time proceeds.

In "Smoke," "Hand Upon the Waters," and "An Error in Chemistry" Gavin has worked almost entirely to expose criminals. He exists in a world where goodness and evil themselves are always immediately evident and tangible. He is unalterably aligned with goodness. He lives in a rather simplistic moral universe similar to that in old cowboy movies where the bad guys wore black hats and the good ones wore white ones. (By the way, Gavin does wear a white panama hat on several occasions.) In "Monk" and "Tomorrow," he still operates from a one-dimensional moral context that is unquestioned and unchallenged, either by himself or anyone else. Throughout these stories Gavin learns lessons about

human nature. In "Go Down, Moses" he learns through his self-inflicted humiliation; but even here the lesson is simply not to tamper with the existing social order (Gavin should not have crossed a social boundary and tried to help the Negresses grieve). The order itself is not brought under fire by either Gavin or Faulkner, although Faulkner does seemingly lament the pathetic condition of the black race. In "Hair," "The Tall Men," and Light in August, Gavin's role can hardly even be described as that of a moral agent; however, as we have seen, his appearance and his characterization in these works are consistent with those where he does have a central part. In "Knight's Gambit," though, we have a genuine mixture of all three categories: He is a moral agent with respect to the way he prevents Gualdres's murder; he is a moral guide to Chick in many of the places where he gives direction and guidance to him; finally, he is a moral person deciding between right and wrong for himself when he decides at last to marry Melisandre Harriss. "I have improved," Gavin says at the end of "Knight's Gambit"--indeed this is so, but his improvement is yet a long way from complete.

CHAPTER III

INTRUDER IN THE DUST

No man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors.

--Intruder in the Dust, p. 231

Gavin's character in Intruder in the Dust has been maligned by too much commentary which hits the target but not the bull's eye. Generally, critics have taken seriously only his first part in the novel, where he is Lucas Beauchamp's lawyer, and have either ignored or glossed over his second function as Chick Mallison's moral guide. Indeed, Gavin has been more severely spoken of in Intruder in the Dust than in any of his other appearances. Most of the comments center on two flaws: one, his failure to recognize the innocence of Lucas Beauchamp when he is first arrested; and, two, his long-winded speech to Chick about racial problems in the South is seen as propagandistic rather than literary. Gavin has consistently been viewed as a failure both as lawyer and moral guide. I would have it that both points are superficially true, but not finally true.

It is to Gavin's great discredit that Intruder in the Dust is not Intruders in the Dust. Clearly, Gavin's behavior would be more honorable and admirable had he immediately perceived the innocence of Lucas and driven out to the church yard with his shovel and spade to try to seek out the real guilty party.

Gavin, however, is not the "intruder" and for good reason; the story itself belongs to young Chick, not Gavin or even Lucas. As such, it is a novel of initiation of a young boy into manhood. As Donald Kartiganer has recently observed, the "context of Intruder in the Dust is . . . to describe realistically the living context of an actual society. The chief purpose of the novel is to demonstrate that the end product of all these traditions is the emerging Chick Mallison, the effective and just young man."⁴² As it happens, his uncle Gavin is there to offer help and give directions; he is not there either to grow or dig. Chick's initiation is centered around the main social problem of the South: racism. Thus, Gavin talks a lot about the problem and Lucas, as Sambo Incarnate in a situation where he is nearly lynched, embodies it. The result is that many readers have become lost in the racial aspects of the story and have forgotten its primary impetus.

Again, the story belongs to Chick Mallison and is of his development. It is not centrally a story about Lucas Beauchamp, racism, brotherly murder or anything else. Lucas, Gavin, states' rights, and so on are all secondary factors to the growth of this young man. Few critics have suggested anything else, but their discussions usually proceed as if the overall context were not present. Cleanth Brooks, Olga Vickery, Edmond Volpe, etc., have all spent much more time and effort on Lucas than on Chick, on states' rights rather than on Chick's personal lessons about racism in his society, and on the lynch mob's conscience. Their commentary may be sound, insightful, and helpful to

⁴²Donald M. Kartiganer, The Fragile Thread (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), pp. 143-4.

any student of Faulkner; but I think it has all been misfocused to the extent that Chick is not kept central to the contextual format. Consequently, Chick's role is appreciably diminished, and Gavin's is misinterpreted. Andrew Lytle has seen that Intruder in the Dust is "not about [social and racial] violence at all. It is about a sixteen-year-old boy's education in good and evil and his effort to preserve his spiritual integrity."⁴³ It is to Chick's great credit that he helps Lucas; but it is not by definition to Gavin's great discredit that he does not do so initially, as most critics have had it.

We should not be too quick to judge Gavin's original inability to see Beauchamp's innocence. In the first place, Lucas himself arrogantly refuses to give him the facts, which prohibits the lawyer's recognition. In the second place, as we are told several times by the author, Lucas would like to pretend that he possessed the nerve to kill a white man; in some bizarre, nearly maniacal fashion, Lucas savors and enjoys the role he plays as a black who has committed an ultimate social taboo for a member of his caste; the murder of a white man. Third, nearly everyone in town immediately accepts his guilt as fact; this is especially true of other blacks who are annoyed that they must go into ritualistic seclusion until the rope swings. Miss Habersham alone is open to the possibility of his innocence, and she does not accept it until hearing Lucas's claim that it was not his gun that killed Gowrie. Fourth, and I do not mean to sound too simplistic, it

⁴³Andrew Lytle, The Hero with the Private Parts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 131.

is necessary to the plot. Chick must do what is right as he grows up, rather than what society--at this point Gavin is society--expects of him. Joseph Gold has sensibly commented that the "failure of Stevens to believe Lucas, to take the case on trust, is necessary to make Lucas's dependence on Chick a real one, growing out of need. It is also for symbolic purposes, however, that Chick is the person who must help Lucas."⁴⁴ Were Gavin to say, "Let's get our shovels," this implication would be lost. Fifth, Lucas's history and character as a black who wears a "Negro mask,"⁴⁵ that is, his lifelong cultivation of the "uppity nigger" role, simply entitles him to the treatment he receives from all involved. Lucas is about to get what he has earned--in one sense. Given all of these points, Gavin's behavior during his first interview with the apprehended Lucas is not as reprehensible as most critics would have it. When the lawyer says, "So you ain't going to tell me what you want me to do until after I have agreed to do it,"⁴⁶ he is being perfectly sensible, while Lucas is not. This, in itself, does not excuse Gavin's belief in his guilt; but when it is paired with the fact that Lucas provides no further substantial information, the belief becomes a reasonable assumption that does not lend itself to mere questioning.

⁴⁴Joseph Gold, William Faulkner (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 85.

⁴⁵Edmond L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), p. 256.

⁴⁶William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 61. Subsequent references from the text are credited parenthetically with the page numbers.

Moreover, Gavin's treatment of Lucas does have a humane aspect to it; the lawyer is prepared to use due process of the law to prevent Lucas's execution:

"They'll indict you. Then if you like I'll have Mr. Hampton move you to Mottstown or even further away than that, until court convenes next month. Then you'll plead guilty; I'll persuade the District Attorney to let you do that because you're an old man and you never were in trouble before; I mean as far as the judge and the District Attorney will know. . . . Then they won't hang you; they'll send you to the penitentiary."

(64-65)

Gavin, taking Lucas's guilt for granted, yet would act to save his life on two counts, both from the law and the mob. Had Gavin simply said, "Sorry, old man, I can't help anyone who won't even tell me his side of what happened," he would have been entirely justified. Again, I am not arguing that the lawyer's behavior toward Lucas is admirable or excusable, but it should be much more sympathetically condoned than has previously been the case.

Gavin has similarly been mistreated by critics writing of his speech to Chick as they travel to the church yard to dig up Vinson Gowrie's grave one more time. His lecture has been heard either as propaganda for the white, Southern, states' rights advocates of the late 1940's, or as Faulkner's own "true beliefs" about racial problems in the South, or, most usually, as both. There is partial legitimacy in these interpretations, yet they should by no means be taken as seriously, and definitely, as they have. The real problem with this speech (and later with the long passages rendering Gavin's thoughts) from a literary point of view is that it is too long. Actually, Gavin's loquaciousness is something entirely consistent to his character--not

evidence for propaganda in the novel or reason to call him a spokesman for Faulkner. By far, however, this has been the most frequent interpretation, not only of Gavin's role in the novel, but of the work itself. I will cite four typical examples:

I assume Gavin Stevens speaks for Faulkner. It is not an assumption that can be sustained through all the novels in which Stevens appears. . . . But the assumption would seem to hold, alas, in Intruder in the Dust, where Stevens is so clearly admired in his role of raisonneur.⁴⁷

In fact, the second half of the novel is largely taken up with the pseudophilosophical ramblings of Gavin Stevens, who as the occasional mouthpiece of Faulkner, can never quite make the distinction between a universal commentary on man and a series of observations on race problems in the South.⁴⁸

No amount of genius can disguise the propagandistic character of these [Gavin's] fulminations.⁴⁹

He [Faulkner] sacrifices his art to social analysis and preaching. The result is a propaganda novel.⁵⁰

The simple truth of the matter is that Gavin makes long speeches all the time, and they generally sound like sermons anyway. To extract these from the overall context of Intruder in the Dust is to work in the wrong direction. In an early review of the novel, Edmund Wilson

⁴⁷Irving Howe, William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 99n.

⁴⁸Gold, p. 89.

⁴⁹Charles Glicksberg, review of Intruder in the Dust in William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage, ed. by John Bassett (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 346. Originally published in Arizona Quarterly (Spring, 1947), 46-58.

⁵⁰Volpe, p. 253.

said these speeches transformed the novel into "tract."⁵¹ Subsequent criticism has repeated this opinion. Consequently, not only has Gavin's character been too severely maligned by such thinking, but so has the novel itself. For example, Joseph Reed echoes the thought when he writes that the "pamphlet is being tricked out with good melodrama and bad arty touches, but it's still pamphlet."⁵² Actually, the passages are evidence only that Faulkner treated the character consistently. The writer himself said that Gavin functions as a spokesman for the South, not for himself as author or person.⁵³ Moreover, the opinions Gavin espouses are consistent with his character as a Southern white intellectual aware of the difficulties around him and rightfully frustrated by the continued efforts of bumbling carpetbaggers trying to solve problems they did not truly and fully understand. Patrick Samway has succinctly summarized the matter in writing, "If anything, Faulkner satirizes Gavin as the Southern spokesman."⁵⁴ I would add only that it is, perhaps, sympathetic satire.

⁵¹Edmund Wilson, "William Faulkner's Reply to the Civil-Rights Program," in William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage, ed. by John Bassett (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 335. Originally published in the New Yorker (23 October, 1948), 106-13.

⁵²Joseph W. Reed, Faulkner's Narrative (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 208.

⁵³Malcolm Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 18.

⁵⁴Patrick Samway, S. J., "Intruder in the Dust: A Re-evaluation." in Faulkner: The Unappeased Imagination, ed. by Glenn O'Carey, (Troy, New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1980), p. 85.

In Intruder in the Dust, however, Faulkner does make several very important points about racial problems in the South. They are, however, not to be found in Gavin's speeches or Lucas's victimization; they can be discovered only in Chick's moral lessons. Faulkner himself doubtlessly had a great deal of sympathy for many of Gavin's statements on the matter, but he is exposing the limitations and inadequacies of the white, Southern do-gooder just as unmistakably as he is preaching the failures of the Yankees for their continued efforts at social reconstruction. Faulkner himself is of much closer kinship to Gavin than Chick, but this does not mean that Gavin is a Faulknerian mouthpiece or that his speeches are propagandistic tracts inserted into the novel. These interpretations are not only unfair to Gavin, but undercut the author's artistry. Granted, Intruder in the Dust is weaker than many of his works, but this weakness is more precisely due to the rather far-fetched plot than to Gavin's speeches.

Moreover, Faulkner did not need a "mouthpiece." He is perfectly able to insert political commentary into the narrative whenever he wishes, and in such a way that there can be no confusion about who is speaking--Faulkner himself. (See page 149, for example, where the author interrupts Gavin's comments about Sambo to make a point about European politics.) In addition, Faulkner often expressed his political convictions about racism in newspapers, public speeches, and other ways. His beliefs were already clearly on the record. He had no reason to implant personal opinion into his fiction, at least not in the fashion that so many have maintained.

Another point about Gavin's role in Intruder in the Dust must be put forth: Faulkner is centrally concerned with Gavin's development into mature manhood, but he is also concerned with Gavin's development as a member of mankind. By this I mean that the issues surrounding Chick involve his personal integrity and social identity; the matters surrounding Gavin pertain to the entire social milieu from national, regional, historical, judicial, and moral perspectives. Chick's burden is to find his role as a mature entity in society. Gavin's burden is to carry the cross of that society, even if he carries it on the wrong path. Both measure up. Chick does succeed as a man, not as a boy; and Gavin succeeds at understanding and explaining the failures and deformities of his society even if he does not succeed in justifying them. Viewed in this way, Gavin's burden is much heavier than Chick's; it is one thing to answer to yourself for your own actions; it is another to answer for the sins of an entire society. Chick answers for his rudeness to Lucas Beauchamp, his host; Gavin answers for his race's injustice to another race.

When Gavin first realizes that Lucas is innocent, he does not feel guilt-ridden because he had not previously recognized that innocence. Indeed, he has nothing to feel guilty about. After all, he had not been part of the mob, nor had he been in a position to disbelieve Lucas's untold story. I suspect Faulkner intentionally kept it that way. That is, if Lucas had told the facts to Gavin at the beginning and Gavin had not accepted them, then he would have been too morally unfit to serve as moral guide to Chick. As it is, Gavin remains "not guilty" although not "innocent," if you will consider the distinction

I am making. He is not guilty of any real crime, moral or legal; nor does he act in any unethical way. He cannot, however, be called innocent so far as Lucas's own innocence is concerned. The point is that Gavin's action is gray--not white as snow. Consequently, he feels or exhibits no remorse for his behavior, but only the great--and the word must be used again--burden for what his society was and is. Would that the critics concentrated on Gavin's affirmation of human values, rather than on his assumption of Lucas's guilt and his extended rhetoric for states' rights. One day Gavin will come to say, "Mankind, the poor sons of bitches," but that day is not yet upon him.

Another important, yet overlooked, point is that Gavin, already a decent and mature man, does not know everything that Chick must learn. Gavin's manhood is already fixed; in a sense he is trapped by it. When he tells his nephew that ". . . no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors," (49) he is applying the statement to Lucas and Mr. Lilley. Ironically, it primarily emphasizes Gavin's own self-blindness in so far as he must come to apply this expression to himself.

Specifically translated, the "vices of his ancestors," are the tenets of the moral code of the Old South as identified above in Chapter I. In this novel the item causing all the difficulty and tension, internal and external, is the racial caste system which holds that blacks are inferior and subservient to whites by birth and definition. The problem, of course, is that Lucas Beauchamp is clearly not inferior, physically, mentally, morally, or otherwise. He certainly outwits Chick in the sequence of gift-swapping events early in the book. As

the youth realizes, "He's not only beat me, he never for one second had any thought about it." (73) Lucas is cunning enough to realize the entanglements of the lumber pilfering. His moral character, except for his arrogance, is entirely acceptable. Finally, he is personally well-adjusted to his social condition and station in life, even though it is an unpleasant one which basically he resents. He has certainly made peace with society in a way that Gavin and Chick, in the shadow of the white man's racial sins, will never be able to do. At the end of the novel, Lucas does pay his fee and has every right to demand the symbolic receipt. Gavin and Chick have not yet paid their bills. Gavin, in particular, is still clinging to the "vices of his ancestors." Chick, on the other hand, is choosing to what extent not to do this. Neither of them, however, has paid his personal or collective debt to society. Indeed, their purpose here is merely to find what the balance is. As Patrick Samway recently commented:

Chick breaks a community taboo and defends Lucas because of the guilt feelings he has towards Lucas; by digging up the graves, Chick is probing the white consciousness to find out its secrets. Gavin, as an older member of the white community, tries to delay this process and Chick rejects Gavin's views and acts with the aid of two companions.⁵⁵

In both cases they are discovering what is wrong with their society and what their responsibility toward it is. Lucas is not in such a position; this knowledge came as a birthcurse.

Gavin's relationship to Chick in Intruder in the Dust is therefore unique because he functions as something of an antiexample. Those

⁵⁵Samway, p. 106.

who would have it that he is Faulkner's mouthpiece simply have not read carefully enough to see that the views expressed by him are designedly wrong answers. True, they are answers frequently vocalized by Southern white intellectuals of the day, but they work in the novel as something clearly opposite to the moral lessons of Chick. The young man does come to see their inadequacies, and he rejects them. Gavin, however, while recognizing their limitations, continues to espouse them as the best possible cause to pursue. Gavin's heart is in the right place; his intentions are good; his capabilities are tremendous. Yet, regardless of all these, he clings inescapably to the ancestral vices. To Chick, and to readers as well, he is an example of what not to become and his beliefs are examples of ideologies not to subscribe to. He remains, though, a moral guide, preventing Chick, and the reader, from giving up on mankind, or at least his particular culture and race. Gavin guides Chick through the crisis and reaffirms moral verities and genuine hope for humanity, while all the while operating from false premises. He succeeds in convincing the youth that all is not in vain. Gavin serves such a purpose throughout the book. He actually goes wrong only once, and that is when he would have Chick forget Lucas's plight and go home to bed. His fallen state is short-lived, however, as John Longley has pointed out in The Tragic Mask:

After Chick and Aleck Sander and frail little old Miss Habersham have gone in the middle of the night and dug up the body, the way is then cleared for the reestablishment of Gavin as the acutely sensitive moral agent he usually is. His understandable exasperation with Lucas only helps remind us he is human, rather than an insufferable prig who is always right about everything. This recovery of his moral sensitivity is firmly established by the

instant rapport between himself and Miss Habersham, when he and Sheriff Hampton are going to open the grave legally.⁵⁶

At its worst, Gavin's conduct in the interview with Lucas serves only not to disqualify him as a moral guide.

Gavin's answers about racial matters are wrong; however, they are not such bad answers for his day. When I say they are wrong, I mean not so much to pass a value judgment on them, but only to suggest that they would not work to ease racial tensions, improve the blighted plight of blacks, or serve to rectify their historically sustained maltreatment. Gavin's attitude that damned Yankee intervention only compacted the problem is correct. Gavin's repeated assertion that the North had not been able to make any headway on racial matters in seventy years is also true. But he errs in thinking that the South, left alone, would force itself to anything more than malaise, limbo, continued stagnation, and occasional lynchings. There was nothing wrong, in itself, with saying, "Yankee, go home, We'll take care of it ourselves." The problem is that it would not have been taken care of.

History has borne this out. In the three decades since Intruder in the Dust was written, the social changes Gavin speaks of have come about. It has been a score of years since any mob lynchings have occurred in the South. (In all fairness it should be pointed out that this was not a social phenomena restricted to the southern side of the Mason-Dixon line. Lynchings of blacks occurred in such places as Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois during the first half of the twentieth century.)

⁵⁶John Longley, The Tragic Mask (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), p. 41.

Consider the era Gavin speaks of; that future is now our present;

Some day Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man; in time he will vote anywhen and anywhere a white man can and send his children to the same school anywhere the white man's children go and travel anywhere the white man travels as the white man does it. But it won't be next Tuesday.

(155)

It is now next Tuesday. It has all happened: the disappearance of the lynch-rope, universal voting, integration/desegregation of school systems, trouble-free travel in public transit and private vehicles, and so on. But all of it has come about, at last, due to forced enactment of federal, that is, Northern, civil rights laws. Gavin may have been just in wanting the "privilege of setting him free ourselves," (154) and his feelings toward the federal government may have had legitimate foundations (the farce of Reconstruction, for example); but he was totally off base in saying that the South could and would do it itself. Gavin's predictions were historically incorrect, and his thinking and values were entrapped in vice. Gavin, regardless of his cosmopolitan experiences and Ph. D. from Heidelberg, is a product of his society functioning to protect that society and its status quo. Chick, on the other hand, is young enough and human enough to work to change what is wrong because it is wrong, regardless of social preconceptions.

Gavin's morality, however, is fixed, not formulated. His beliefs are basically not subject to change to the extent that his behavior would be much altered. Gavin, too, grows and develops in Intruder in the Dust, although not so much as Chick. This novel is the first place where he relinquishes his role of lawyer-detective. Chick becomes sleuth when he takes Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham on their midnight excursion,

His role, though, is short-lived, for as soon as he returns to town and tells his uncle what he found in Vinson Gowrie's grave, Gavin resumes his previous role for a while as he puzzles out the location of the two burial sites and proceeds to explain the motivations of the Gowries, Jake Montgomery, and Lucas Beauchamp. Notice that when explaining human behavior he is still quite successful as long as he is dealing with individuals. He falters when he tries to defend and explain the faults of his race and culture.

As his role of lawyer-detective is lessened, however, so is his role of moral guide enhanced. Previously, he has served occasionally in this function with Chick, primarily with a moral remark or two, here and there. In Intruder in the Dust, however, the importance of his role as guide far outweighs his role as detective. It falls on Gavin's shoulders to explain such things as why the mob went home without an apology to Lucas and why Chick should not give up on Southern society. It should be realized that Gavin is not only answering the questions for Chick, but for himself. Lucas Beauchamp and the circumstances of the Gowrie/Montgomery murders force Gavin to certain realizations. It is he who interprets moral issues and provides answers about them, just as Chick asks questions, and Lucas and the Gowries create the situation. As Elizabeth Kerr has written, "Gavin is not an ideal character, but he is the most nearly so of upper-class professional men in Jefferson."⁵⁷ In truth, Chick does not need an ideal character, but a human one, which is what he finds in Gavin, who is not so bad as he has been treated,

⁵⁷Elizabeth Kerr, Yoknapatawpha (New York: Fordham Press, 1969), p. 203.

Since it is primarily Chick's story, I do not want to fall into the same trap as other critics by mentioning him in passing and then focusing upon a secondary character or theme of the work. At this point I will explain what happens to Chick so that I can then relate his experiences to Gavin's function and personal development in the novel. In explaining what happens to Chick I wish to concentrate upon two quotations:

This would have to be all; whatever would or could set him [Chick] free was beyond not merely his reach but even his ken; he could only wait for it if it came and do without it if it didn't. (23)

Lucas Beauchamp once the slave of any white man within range of whose notice he happened to come [was] now tyrant over the whole county's white conscience. (199)

Understanding the thematic connection of these two quotations will provide more knowledge of the novel, its characters, and its social and racial ideas than all the galvanic diatribes of the last thirty years.⁵⁸ These quotations are the two central focal points of Faulkner's work here, and the relationship between them is its theme, which is a literary one--not a dialectical sermon about racism.

The first quotation must be set into context before it can be explained. Faulkner as narrator is telling us some of the realizations which Chick is making in the gift-swapping sequence between Chick and

⁵⁸My favorite is from Ms. Joanne Creighton, who in discussing Intruder in the Dust wrote that "while Gavin Stevens is annoyingly ubiquitous in Faulkner's fiction, often as an inept bungler and an obtuse windbag, he is nonetheless the vehicle for Faulkner's belief in the redemptive potential, floundering as it may be, of education and idealism in man." William Faulkner's Craft of Revision (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1977), p. 148.

Lucas. Lucas, as has already been mentioned, easily won the contest, which has left Chick in a state of indebtedness to him for his food, warmth, and hospitality after he fell into the creek. At this point Chick has fully realized that his debt will remain on the books until something can happen to cancel it out. This "something" is the "whatever" that "would or could set him free," that is, from his indebtedness to Lucas. Chick sees that the circumstances of the "whatever" are beyond his grasp and domain; all he can do is wait.

The "whatever," of course, comes when Vinson Gowrie's murderer frames Lucas, and then Chick is given the chance to pay off his debt by exonerating Lucas. By this time it is not a matter of returning a favor. When Chick threw the coins down to pay for Lucas's hospitality to him, the whole matter was transformed from the realm of social amenities to moral dilemma. On the one hand, Chick knows that he personally and rightfully owes this much, at least this much, to Lucas as some sort of atonement for his earlier action. On the other hand, he knows that he should follow the dictates of his society, as vocalized here by Gavin, and simply go home and get some sleep. It is truly difficult for him not to follow his uncle's orders. "He had begun it when he was a child, when he could scarcely remember, out of that blind and absolute attachment to his mother's only brother which he had never tried to reason about, and he had done it ever since." (21) But it is even more difficult for him to follow his conscience and illegally violate a grave. Even when going to the graveyard the next morning in the company of Gavin, the sheriff, and the daylight, he arrives wishing that he could run away from the whole affair;

He now recognized that enormity of what he had blindly meddled with and that his first instinctive impulse--to run home and fling saddle and bridle on the horse and ride as the crow flies into the last stagger of exhaustion and then sleep and then return after it was all over--had been the right one (who now simply because he happened not to be an orphan had not even that escape) because it seemed to him now that he was responsible for having brought into the light glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake too since he was bred of it, which otherwise might have flared and blazed merely out of Beat Four and then vanished back into its darkness or at least invisibility with the fading embers of Lucas's crucifixion.
(137-8)

I do not want to present an overly dramatic interpretation of Chick's decision to dig up the Gowrie grave in order to save a Negro, but it loudly echoes Huck Finn's decision to "do what's right and go to hell."

The "something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county" is more than the Gowrie fratricide. The stench of the decaying corpse is not nearly so great as the stench of the decayed morals which both sacrifices the innocent Lucas (perhaps the word crucifixion is too strong here; one would think that Faulkner had finished with it by the time Percy Grimm murdered Joe Christmas in Light in August) and protects the murder of one white brother by another. As Chick digs up the grave he unearths the white man's guilt and ignominy.

Chick has thus paid his debt to Lucas as an individual; but now, as a mature man he must acknowledge his debt both to his white society and Lucas's black race. It is out of the frying pan and into the fires of hell; and his reaction, again, is to recoil and run. Gavin, however, through his discourse, convinces him not to give up on his people and land. Earlier, Chick had achieved an important realization with

the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man, not with just a man's passions and aspirations and

beliefs but the specific passions and hopes and convictions and ways of thinking and acting of a specific kind and even race. . . since it had also integrated into him whatever it was that had compelled him to stop and listen to a damned highnosed impudent Negro. . . and the great River itself flowing not merely from the north but out of the North circumscribing and outland--the umbilicus of America joining the soil which was his home to the parent which three generations ago it had failed in blood to repudiate. . . . (151)

All of this previous build-up, if you will, in which Faulkner connects the land with racial inequities, is married to the quality which, finally, has made Chick the young man who will do what is right to help an innocent "damned highnosed impudent Negro." It, too, is a product of the land just as much as the lynch-rope; thus Gavin would have it, and later this connection legitimizes (at least in Gavin's mind) the Yankee-go-home polemics.

At this point the second quotation can be related to the first, for it is the land itself--this country the South--which sustains Lucas Beauchamp both as slave and "tyrant over the whole county's white conscience," and Chick Mallison, in a very literal sense, his savior. The matter is even more compacted when we recall that the "white conscience" is now open bare to the realities not only of its sins against the black race, but also of its buried, ceremonial sanction of fratricide at the Caledonia Church, where, doubtlessly Vinson Gowrie had been sung into heaven to the tune of "Amazing Grace." Faulkner's indictment of the white race is not so much for its guilt toward the black race, although this surely is severe enough, but for this latter act and condition. It is one thing to enslave the black man; it is another to murder your brother. Ironically, here at least, the white brother is murdered, while the black one escapes and endures.

Chick's moral lesson, then, takes into account all of this. When he is able to repay his debt to Lucas Beauchamp, he cancels out the morally reprehensible act of offering, then throwing, coins to Lucas. In so doing, however, he becomes aware of a far more weighty, existing, social and racial burden to Lucas and his people. The theme, then, of Intruder in the Dust has nothing to do with states' rights, lynch-mob etiquette, or the imagined homogeneity of the South. It does, however, have something to do with the reaffirmation of values, hope, and yes, morality, when all the evidence proves vice, despair, and corruption. Chick Mallison, as is clearly indicated in the narrative, is not given to his "uncle's abnegant and rhetorical self-lacerating which was the phony one [rhetoric]." (133) Chick sees through his uncle's mistakes and verbosity, and thereby transcends them. Too many critics have failed to recognize that Gavin's rhetoric is simply that; his loquaciousness is his inherent style of talking. As such, it is a minor point, yes; but that does not excuse so many misreadings of a work--or, at least, so many misfocused ones. Cleanth Brooks, as quoted in Chapter I, has sensibly recognized that

Gavin Stevens occupies no privileged position in Faulkner's novels: sometimes he talks sense and sometimes he talks nonsense. Doubtless, what he says often represents what many Southerners think and what Faulkner himself--at one time or another--has thought. But Gavin is not presented as the sage and wise counselor of the community. His notions have to take their chances along with those of less "intellectual" characters.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 279-80.

Gavin's role in Intruder in the Dust can now be discussed more specifically. I have already indicated that he maintains two earlier functions of explaining human behavior, such as that of Lucas and the lynch mob, and of detecting crime and the unknown, such as locating the incumbent location of the bodies of Jake Montgomery and Vinson Gowrie. These, however, are minor functions in comparison to his chief one as moral guide. To put it briefly, Faulkner's fiction, at least as it is evidenced in Intruder in the Dust, is affirmative--even when the white conscience is symbolically embodied in the stench of Vinson Gowrie's grave. Gavin Stevens is the instrument of that affirmation, not a mouthpiece for states' rights.

In any case, Gavin's arguments for states' rights are rather absurd. He speaks primarily of the "homogeneity" of the South, the failures of the North to save Sambo, and the rights of Southerners to rectify their own moral transgressions. Well, the rest of the country was as racially mixed as the South; the failures of the North should have been viewed with lamentation, not triumph. Furthermore, the South as a society was not about to improve Sambo's condition because the Gowries too decidedly outnumber the Chicks and Gavins. Any child could see through Gavin's "abnegant" and "phony" rhetoric. Judith Wittenberg has recognized that his "States' Rights stance in Intruder in the Dust is made questionable by the context in which it appears."⁶⁰ Faulkner has succeeded at indicting Gavin's opinions without attacking the good parts of his character. Moreover, as pointed out by Hyatt Waggoner,

⁶⁰Judith Wittenberg, Faulkner: The Transfiguration of Biography (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 214.

"the long-winded religio-political speeches of Gavin Stevens are not intrusive or functionsless but codify the theme that without them would be implicit anyway."⁶¹ Again, that theme has to do with what Chick learns, not with what Gavin says. Too many readers have centered upon what one critic calls "uncle Gavin's fatuous abstractions about the race problems."⁶²

Chick's lesson, finally, has very little to do with Lucas Beauchamp, whose near lynching has only served as a springboard for the plot. Chick becomes aware of his inherited place in a depraved society; Gavin becomes aware of his role in maintaining that depravity. Michael Millgate speaks of Gavin's "new wisdom";

. . . in the early stages of the novel Stevens suffers from those characteristic limitations of his time, class, and environment which Charles Mallison manages, through youth and innocence, to transcend. But Stevens takes to himself the truths his nephew discovers, absorbs them not his thinking, and speaks in later sections of the novel with the authority of this new wisdom.⁶³

Gavin, too, must recognize and deal with his own complicity in preserving the corrupt state of affairs. It has little to do with Lucas, who actually feels compelled to pay the lawyer for his services. Gavin never tries to justify the bad conditions around him; he merely explains them and pleads for hope in the worthiness of mankind.

⁶¹Hyatt Waggoner, William Faulkner (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 218.

⁶²Richard Perrill Adams, Faulkner, Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 156.

⁶³Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 215.

In Intruder in the Dust Gavin sins not so much as an individual, but as a member of a society. He does not violate Lucas's integrity as a man when he refuses to agree to do something before he even knows what it is. He does, however, protect the tenets of the moral code of the Old South, and by so doing he helps secure continued racism. This concern transcends both Lucas's near lynching and Gavin's long speeches. Donold Kartiganer has written:

As things turn out the novel is not about defiance but about acceptance and revitalization of a community. Chick is the central consciousness who gradually discovers that his purposes, if not his methods, are consistent with that social ethic which, whatever his impatience with it, has in fact shaped him into what he believes and what he has become. Chick eventually realizes that he is being driven not by hatred but by love, not by rejection of his community but by a hope for it so strong that it becomes a standard of excellence almost too difficult for community to bear.⁶⁴

It is Gavin who singularly leads Chick to this realization and belief in hope for the community.

Gavin's role is to help Chick recognize "what he believes and what he has become." On a secondary level, however, these words apply just as fastly to Gavin himself. His functions here are more numerous and his character is more multi-faceted than in any work yet discussed. By this time many aspects of his personhood such as his loquaciousness, tendency to meddle, proclivity for justice, detection of crime, etc., can all be mechanically taken for granted. In Faulkner's continuing development of this man's character the author no longer deals with these; but he concentrates on themes which Gavin has previously been exposed to but the implications of which have remained unresolved. In

⁶⁴Kartiganer, p. 141.

particular, Gavin's humiliation at Miss Worsham's home due to his white liberal actions in visiting Butch's wake is revisited in his experience with Lucas. The magnitude is vastly increased, however, for in the earlier story he had been embarrassed because of his own mistake; in Intruder in the Dust he is humiliated not because of his personal actions, but those of his race and class. There is now a marked shift in emphasis from external to internal conflict in his character. This internal nature is focused upon the theme of "An Error in Chemistry," the most recent appearance of Gavin prior to the writing of Intruder in the Dust. "Know thyself. . . thine arrogance and vanity and pride." It is not Lucas per se who forces the lawyer to realize the false vanity and pride which he has arrogantly displayed as he rhetorically defends the sins of the white race--it is Chick's questions.

Gavin has been arrogant about the ancestral vices he clings to. At the end he is still manifestly attached to them, but his arrogance is gone. Lucas, however, can now flaunt all three qualities of arrogance, vanity, and pride as he demands his receipt. When Faulkner wrote that Lucas was now tyrant of the white conscience of the whole county, he certainly included Gavin among the citizentry. In "Go Down, Moses" Gavin retreats to his office after Butch Beauchamp's burial; Intruder in the Dust, written earlier, ends in the same office; but there has been no retreat.

Also, Faulkner must have had in mind Gavin's very early role in Light in August when he characterized him in this later work. The similarities are rather obviously parallel. In both stories Gavin

explains the behavior and motivations of a man socially victimized because of race. In the first novel Gavin had taken for granted that Christmas is black, which never made clear by the author himself although several passages indicate that he had no black blood. In this later work he takes for granted Lucas's guilt. The implications of his assumption in Light in August are never dealt with; in Intruder in the Dust, however, they clearly are. In the first work Gavin only described conflicts external to himself; in this one we are greatly aware of the internal strife wrought by the assumptions of society.

Gavin's role in Intruder in the Dust can be described as a blending of some unresolved character traits suggested in these earlier works. Gavin does come to know himself, his arrogance and vanity and pride, as Faulkner focuses upon his faults and weaknesses in this novel, first hinted at in "Go Down, Moses" and Light in August. His humility and defeat in "Go Down, Moses" is paired with a mechanically made assumption about guilt and race, closely akin to the one he had made in Light in August. These internal qualities are rendered in a context of "Know thyself." He learns that there is a difference between what is right and what is Southern, and between what he believes and what is. He is no longer limited to mere mental acumen about human conduct, but is achieving some wisdom about mankind. On a personal level he is not so much concerned with mistakes of his own as with mistakes of his society. Gavin's fault is not that he failed to recognize Lucas's innocence; it is that he protects and clings to the ancestral vices. By his own recognition, "No man can cause more grief" than he himself. Gavin ties not the noose for the lynch mob, but he varnishes the scaffold.

Life can no longer be so simplistic as it had previously been. Originally, all he had to do was protect the weak, right injustice, and punish evil. But Faulkner has now taken him out of this realm and into that region where the human heart experiences internal conflict, Protect the weak? This word hardly describes Lucas, who is "protected" by feeble, seventy-year-old Miss Habersham. Right injustice? Gavin is perpetrating injustice. Punish evil? The final lesson is that he himself is a source of evil; it is one thing to have "self-lacerating" rhetoric--it is another to inflict self-lacerating punishment. As Faulkner himself said of Gavin and as previously quoted, he got "into a real world in which people anguished and suffered, not simply did things they shouldn't." All of this is both externally and internally realized. For Gavin, morality becomes a condition, not a rulebook. The rulebook he had mastered long ago, as had Chick, but mastering a condition is something else. Gavin successfully defends the validity and integrity of the rulebook; that is, he honors the moral code of the Old South. Now, however, he is not smugly secure in thinking that that code and goodness are the same thing. Chick's questions will not permit such complacency. In his next appearance in Requiem for a Nun, the situation is reversed, for it is Gavin's probing questions which destroy the self-maintained complacency of Temple Drake. In both books Gavin's function is to help expose the sins of the social order. His speeches in Intruder in the Dust are never designed, even rhetorically, for creating a new code.

By this time we can also recognize a pattern at play when Gavin interprets human motivation. In his first role as lawyer-

detective, he is never at a loss, nor is he ever mistaken, as he explains the actions of others. In Intruder in the Dust he yet maintains this role, except for his failure to pursue the real murderer of Vinson Gowrie. This is not characteristic of him, and has obviously been necessary to make real Lucas's dependency upon Chick, as previously explained. In Requiem for a Nun this is most central to his role as he explains Temple's actions to herself. This ability, however, diminishes almost to disappearance in the Snopes trilogy, where Ratliff becomes the man with all the answers and insights and Gavin becomes explicitly involved with the moral issues at hand. What all of this means is that work by work there exists more evidence of the complexity and multi-dimensional qualities of his personality. Intruder in the Dust marks Gavin's first true appearance in a novel. Prior to this time he had been a character only in short stories and very briefly in Light in August. His role here is thematically secondary to Chick's, but his involvement with that theme is so central and inescapable that this hardly diminishes it. The fact that Faulkner has given him such a weighty part helps underscore the author's increasing involvement with the progress of his character. Gavin never again appears in a short story.

According to Faulkner's letters to his editors, his conception of Intruder in the Dust went through at least three different stages. His original intention had been to write a short detective story in which a Negro had to free himself from jail and prevent his lynching by proving his innocence of a murder charge. The idea for the story dates back at least as early as 1940. When he started to write, how-

ever, his conception changed again.⁶⁵ In this intermediary stage of composition the novel evidently belonged to Gavin, or at least to his speeches:

On January 15 I put the big manuscript aside and I now have 60 pages on an approximate 120 page short novel set in my apocryphal Jefferson. The story is a mystery-murder though the theme is more relationship between Negro and white, specifically or rather the premise being that the white people in the South, before the North or the government, or anyone else, owe and must pay a responsibility to the Negro.⁶⁶

By April 20 of the same year (1948), he had finished the work, and, having done so, decided that it was about something else;

Let me know what you think of the book. It started out to be a simple quick 150 page whodunit but jumped the traces, strikes me as being a pretty good study of a sixteen-year-old boy who overnight became a man.⁶⁷

Most would agree that Faulkner succeeded at transforming the "whodunit" into something else. That something, in part, was a Yankee-go-home diatribe. It is substantially more than this, however; for the novel succeeds only as a novel of initiation, as Faulkner recognized after he had finished it. It is not Skullduggery in the Dust or Jugglery in the Dust, as it was almost entitled.⁶⁸

Gavin's political polemics, however, are finally transformed into Chick's moral dialectics. Toward the very end of the novel, after

⁶⁵Joseph Blotner, ed., Selected Letters of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 128.

⁶⁶Ibid, p. 262.

⁶⁷Ibid, p. 266

⁶⁸Ibid, p. 265.

Gavin has got the racial sermons out of his system, he makes a number of valid moral statements about humanity. It is as though Faulkner, or Gavin one, has at least separated the grain from the chaff. In Chapters Ten and Eleven many of his statements are sensible, coherent, and pertinent.

While Gavin is helping the sheriff capture Crawford Gowrie, he mentions in passing that "we're after just a murderer, not a lawyer." (221) His statement has such obvious self-application, and much more so than a cursory reader sees. For, finally, the characters in Intruder in the Dust have not been in pursuit of a murderer, but in pursuit of those who have sustained and perpetrated the defunct social order. In short, they have been in pursuit of their own faults: neither Lucas Beauchamp nor Crawford Gowrie are pillars of the established community. That role belongs to Gavin. To pursue the faults of human nature is to pursue one's own heart. Gavin catches both a murderer and a lawyer, and it is the lawyer who causes him all the grief; his own sins are revealed.

At another place Gavin, in explaining why the mob went home without so much as an apology, says that they "were not running from him [Lucas], they were running from Crawford Gowrie," (199) Shortly thereafter, Chick amends his statement to, "They were not running from Crawford Gowrie or Lucas Beauchamp either. They were running from themselves. They ran home to hide their heads under the bedclothes from their own shame." (202) There is, however, distance between Gavin and Chick on one hand and the mob on the other. Gavin and Chick have not run, but have remained to help the sheriff clean up what the youth

calls the "vomit" of the community, Notice that Faulkner unfolds this point to show that society did not run home because it had mistakenly almost hanged a nigger. That is not it at all, although the moral ramifications of the near hanging are, by themselves, hard enough. They have run home because of their horror at the murder of one white brother by another, and their own association with that heinous crime. All have sinned and come up short, but some have come up shorter than others. Gavin, Chick, Miss Habersham, Aleck Sander, the sheriff, and a few others have acted to preserve Lucas and human decency; and they, too, are community.

Gavin recognizes his personal involvement with the other community, though, the mob and the Gowries. When Miss Habersham realizes that "He put his brother in quicksand," Gavin's reply is "That moment may come to anyone. . . ." The statement is a personal confession as much as a general observation about the nature of man. The crowd knows, at least by religious cliché, that "we are all brothers." Thus their intended lynching of Lucas makes them all as guilty of murder as Crawford Gowrie was of the actual murder of Vinson. Lucas is not the "symbol of the white conscience of the whole county"-- Faulkner called him the "tyrant" over it. The symbol of the white conscience is Vinson Gowrie's sand-soaked corpse. When Gavin says "anyone" to Miss Habersham, he does not mean "anyone from Beat Four," "anyone who is a Yankee," or even "anyone except me." Specifically, he means "anyone including me." The internal conflict which results is never fully resolved, at least not in Intruder in the Dust; but he knows now that he, too, is susceptible to such a crime. It is to his

credit that he does not despair, given such a possibility, and, moreover, that he prevents the boy from doing so. Gavin has come to see "one irremediable invincible repudiation, upon not a racial outrage but a human shame." (97)

To conclude I would like to connect this realization with a critical comment about Faulkner's work in general made by Leslie Fiedler:

It is, perhaps, because in Faulkner's fiction alone, in the first half of the twentieth century, the Faustian figure persists as a living obsession, that Faulkner has come to seem our greatest contemporary novelist. What would strike us otherwise as mere hectic rhetoric and conventional gothic decor is transformed by this central concern into a tragic cry and an evocation of terror.⁶⁹

Fiedler is to the point, although he does not apply this assertion to Intruder in the Dust. Gavin's "hectic rhetoric" is throughout the work, and certainly the "gothic decor" is present in the Gowrie graves. The word transformed is the important one, however. Gavin accomplishes a meaningful transformation of rhetorical and gothic elements into a "tragic cry." He does so not by dealing with a "racial outrage but a human shame." He clings to the ancestral vices and therefore brings grief to himself and the community of man: anyone can put his brother in quicksand.

⁶⁹Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 470.

CHAPTER IV

REQUIEM FOR A NUN

This face [of the South] is a little different, a little more than that. Something has happened to it--tragedy--something, against which it had had no warning, and to cope with which (as it discovered) no equipment, yet which it has accepted and is trying, really and sincerely and selflessly (perhaps for the first time in its life) to do its best with according to its code.

--Requiem for a Nun, p. 47

Requiem for a Nun is not as provocative as most of Faulkner's works. The important issues and questions which it does raise have, in a way not true of his other novels, long since been laid to rest. No genuine controversies are lingering or dialogues are continuing about the work; it has received scarcely any critical treatment during the last five years. In the MLA bibliographies from 1975 to date, only five titles are listed which refer to Requiem for a Nun or Temple Drake; none discuss Gavin Stevens or other aspects of the work. Occasionally, a chapter of a book has been devoted to Requiem, but only for the sake of completeness; and seldom is anything truly new actually presented. As I said, very little controversy surrounds the work, and the issues which Faulkner does raise in it have all more or less been settled and left to quiet repose in the critical world. I can think of no other work by Faulkner for which this is so consistently the case. Cleanth Brooks's chapter about Requiem in The Yoknapatawpha Country (interestingly enough, he did not even mention it in his 1978 Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond) and Olga Vickery's section in The Novels of William

Faulkner cover and, practically speaking, resolve all the major problems. Other articles and chapters about Temple Drake or Requiem are either repetitive or "asides,"

The first item of issue is whether or not Requiem for a Nun should rightfully be considered a novel or a play. Critics have pointed out its rather strange structure, which uniquely has long novelesque prose sections as interludes between the acts. No one, however, has made any particularly revealing comments about its odd structure, regardless of all the talk about the coming together of two art forms. What everyone has agreed about is that the structure of the work is a failure; some have had it a "noble failure"--but no one has praised Faulkner's accomplishment in this respect; some have lauded his attempt. Judith Wittenberg recently summarized the consensus about its form:

When Requiem for a Nun was published in 1951, it was generally regarded as "didactic," as an "ambitious failure." Critics were unhappy with the work's tone, and readers were put off by its unusual form as a symbolic play-cum-history-cum-novel. . . . Yet the work is a startling experiment with no antecedent in Faulkner's earlier work, for it combines not only two narrative forms, the play and the essay, but two distinct styles of writing. . . . The disparity of the style and mode is severe.⁷⁰

The second most popular critical effort is to compare Temple Drake in Requiem to Temple Drake in Sanctuary. In so doing, virtually all sentiments evidently flow from the same vein of thought. Temple in Requiem is seen as something of a natural and logical outgrowth of the earlier Temple. Her behavior in the second work is traced to her con-

⁷⁰Judith Bryant Wittenberg, Faulkner: The Transformation of Biography (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 218.

duct in the first one, usually through the vocabulary of the psychologist. Again, all agree that she was mentally, emotionally, and spiritually scarred from her experiences with Popeye, Memphis, Gowan, and the corn cob, such that her actions in Requiem can be neatly related and explained in terms of her previous appearance.

Third, many critics have elaborated about Faulkner's juxtaposition of the past and present. A great deal has been said about the relation between the history of Yoknapatawpha County and Jackson and the at-hand events in the Stevens's living room, the governor's mansion, and the jail. Again, the intricacies have been worked out in such a way that no critic's comments take issue with or particularly exclude other interpretations.

Fourth, many critics have pointed out that Faulkner is exposing the differences between legal and divine justice, civil and moral law, and the laws of man and the laws of God. The intermingling ramifications of Gavin Stevens as lawyer, Temple Drake as victim, Nancy Manigoe as murderer, the governor as judge, as well as the institutions of prison and government, have all been rather harmoniously delineated.

Fifth, it is usually agreed that Temple achieves some sort of atonement through her ritualistic confession to the governor and her cognizance of what Nancy had actually wrought. Much has been written about sacrificial scapegoats, rebirth coming out of death, and salvation through suffering as Christian motifs at work here. Almost everyone agrees that Temple is saved from her past history, her present condition, and her omnipresent sinful nature. Confession, repentance, penance, absolution--all have been worked into age-old formulas and

patterns. The criticism is basically sound. Consider a recent, well-worded, overall interpretation of Requiem for a Nun by Lyall H. Powers:

If the scapegoat has fulfilled its sacrificial role, one must then acknowledge the sacrifice and admit responsibility for it--as Temple has been able to do, and as the white South must also do. In specific terms, the white South must admit responsibility for what it has done to the enslaved Negro and accept the sacrifices the Negro has suffered--willingly (like Nancy) or not. That, of course, will require courage and love and pity and honor--as Gavin Stevens insists.⁷¹

Of these five points, I will disagree only with the last one. The problem, as identified by Frederick Hoffman, is that "Gavin Stevens has clearly counseled an admission of guilt without a precise assurance of either God or heaven."⁷²

As a matter of fact, the only important items of contention are the motivation of Nancy Mannigoe's murder of Temple's daughter and her later pronouncement to "believe." Repeatedly, critics have asked why Nancy murders the infant, and various possibilities have been presented. Even so, there yet exists general agreement that this is a weak but necessary point of the plot. Moreover, there is much circumlocution about the "necessity" of the sacrifice and its ultimate relation to Temple's moral purification. Perhaps Sally Page has most succinctly expressed the conventional interpretation;

Nancy's murder of Temple's baby is an action designed to force Temple to accept the role of responsible motherhood to her other child. It is a symbolic act based on the idea that man can overcome his evil through sacrifice and suffering. However, . . .

⁷¹Lyall H. Powers, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 217.

⁷²Frederick J. Hoffman, William Faulkner (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), p. 110.

Faulkner relies entirely on an extreme and totally symbolic action to convey his theme rather than on the complex, symbolically-tempered realism of most of his fiction.⁷³

Similarly, Nancy's simple pronouncement that we should "believe" has been read in different ways. The obvious question is, "Believe what?" Everyone asks it, and the answers have varied considerably. Often the conjecture has to do with suffering for salvation, believing in Christ, or "enduring" in the Faulknerian spirit. Even here, the interpretations are similar in that all have found this pronouncement affirmative. Richard Adams, however, has provided one important exception which should be cited:

The moral is expressed by Nancy's rare, intransitive injunction, "Believe." Her verb has no object because it is spoken in support of a process which, if it is truly dynamic, can only be that of motion itself, continually moving, never really ended by any object or objective. Her belief, which she states a little more explicitly, is that sin and suffering are inevitable, though never fortunate. The flow in her logic . . . is that. . . she demands acceptance of life on the part of other people while rejecting it for herself and for the murdered child.⁷⁴

That the criticism of Requiem for a Nun is rather cut and dried is something I will not presently try to change. After studying it I, too, concur that the important questions are all answered. Recent articles about the work do not add anything to the existing criticism, although they may fulfill a self-defined purpose. For example, a recent article in American Quarterly entitled "The Four Faces of Temple Drake: Faulkner's Sanctuary, Requiem for a Nun, and the Two Film

⁷³Sally R. Page, Faulkner's Women: Characterization and Women (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1972), pp. 181-182.

⁷⁴Richard P. Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 157.

Adaptations"⁷⁵ discusses Temple's role as a female model-victim of twentieth century male chauvinism (or some facsimile thereof). The article adds nothing to a reader's understanding of Requiem for a Nun, although it does present several good points about Temple Drake's role as a female in the earlier part of the century. My intention, as previously stated and carried out in earlier chapters, is to discuss Gavin's role in the work. In so doing, I will make a number of new comments about Requiem, Gavin, and Temple.

To begin with, Gavin's role here has been rather succinctly explained in an early study by Olga Vickery: "In it [Requiem], Gavin Stevens, the 'Sage of Yoknapatawpha', becomes a Socratic midwife presiding over the moral dialectic which focuses on Temple Drake."⁷⁶ She later wrote that Gavin's "concern is to re-establish justice as a moral and personal concept instead of merely a legal and social precept."⁷⁷ Vickery has worked out most of the implications and progress of Gavin's probing into Temple's conscience as he elicits her confession.

Temple Drake come to Requiem for a Nun from Sanctuary, published twenty years earlier. Gavin comes to the work fresh out of Intruder in the Dust. In other words, Temple is on the rebound from a Memphis whorehouse and the corruption of the legal system which permitted

⁷⁵E. Pauline Degenfelder, "The Four Faces of Temple Drake: Faulkner's Sanctuary, Requiem for a Nun, and the Two Film Adaptations," American Quarterly (Winter, 1976), pp. 544-560.

⁷⁶Olga Vickery, "Gavin Stevens: From Rhetoric to Dialectic," Faulkner Studies, 2(Spring, 1953), 4.

⁷⁷Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 115.

popeye to go free after her perjury. Gavin is on the rebound from the stench of Vinson Gowrie's grave. In both cases the legal system has manifestly failed to enact justice, legal or moral. In Requiem for a Nun this system, in which Gavin holds his professional credentials, fails (has failed, will continue to fail) to save Temple and Nancy, or to reconcile them to the community of man at large.

As in Intruder in the Dust, Gavin is once again removed from the plot. That is, he has not been involved with the murder of the child or any of the previous actions of Temple, Nancy, or Gowan. The real point of the plot, of course, is whether or not Temple will confess "everything"; it has little to do with the child murder or whether or not Nancy will receive a reprieve. In this pursuit of "everything," Gavin is not only an active participant in the attempted purgation, but he is the singular instrument of it. His role as moral guide has thus been greatly magnified from the position held in Intruder in the Dust. In the novel he had simply been an answerer of questions about moral issues; in the play he himself asks the questions designed to probe all the moral entanglements of Temple's condition. To go from answering to asking may not seem like advancement; however, that depends upon the answers and questions. As guide Gavin helps Temple understand and judge her own actions. By so doing he reestablishes himself primarily as a teacher. This accounts for the "Socratic" part of the phrase Vickery applied to him, for his role as teacher is carried out with his Greek, formulaic questioning. He is a "midwife" in the sense that he wants to assist at the birth of a regenerate Temple, but it is a still birth. His function in Intruder in the Dust

had been to use a dust cloth and apply the furniture polish; in Requiem for a Nun his attempt is to rebuild the temple; but his constructive efforts fail.

In this work Gavin is clearly placed into what Faulkner calls a "real world in which people anguish and suffer, not simply do things which they shouldn't do," (See p. 5 of Chapter I.) The world in which people commit actions which they "simply" should not is the world of the lawyer-detective, the agent. But this world of anguish and suffering is in varying degrees Temple's and Nancy's; it is also a world which requires instruction and guidance. Thus Gavin has completely left behind the world of whodunits and moved into one where the question is not "Who?"--but "Why?" In the Knight's Gambit stories, Gavin had prodded people with questions primarily in the interest of legal justice or just knowing the answer. In Intruder in the Dust he had generally left behind this function and become moral guide to Chick. With Temple, this second role of his development is perfected. In the Snopes novels Gavin's personal corruption will prohibit him from carrying out a role which requires such moral complacency.

Temple Drake, however, is not the only person for whom Gavin is moral guide in Requiem for a Nun. He just as assuredly serves the same function to someone else. At one point in the work, discussing two aspects of her nearly schizophrenic nature, Temple places much emphasis upon whether she is Temple Drake or Mrs. Gowan Stevens. She is, of course, not going through an "identity crisis"; the point is that she sinned, originally at least, as Temple Drake, and she cannot escape the consequence of that sin by assuming the character of Mrs.

Gowan Stevens. This is one of the main acknowledgments Gavin socratically wrings forth.

Temple, however, is not the only person who more or less maintains internally a dual nature--if not identity--and who is brought to cognizance of it by Gavin. Gowan Stevens is on the one hand Gowan Stevens; on the other he is Temple's husband. I think most readers remember him as "Temple's husband," rather than as Gowan Stevens, since this is in Requiem for a Nun his foremost part. Gowan, too, suffers and learns in his own way. Temple gets all the attention from an audience or reader, but she does not get all of Gavin's or Faulkner's.

At the beginning of the work Gowan is little more than the insufferable adolescent of Sanctuary. As a college student eight years previous, he had been indirectly responsible for Temple's rape and her extended visit to the Memphis whorehouse. He consequently married her in an attempt to restore her honor and to rectify his mistakes. Moreover, he gave up alcohol because his drunkenness had, in a way, started the whole problem. During Requiem for a Nun Gavin leads Gowan to understand that this has not been enough. Moreover, Gowan learns that his efforts were not only inadequate, but misdirected. One cannot pay for an act committed while drunk by simply practicing abstinence thereafter. Subsequent abstention from alcohol may prevent further villainy, but it will not change history. Similarly, Gowan's marriage to Temple cannot restore her presumed virginity; nor does it alter that part of her character which enjoyed the Memphis whorehouse. Gavin brings Gowan to such realizations.

The lawyer conspires to hide Gowan in the governor's mansion when Temple tells "everything" for at least two reasons; One of these is the dramatic effect of having Temple admit her adultery to Gavin and the governor unaware of her husband's presence; a lesser reason is to insure that when Temple tells all she tells it to all concerned. A third factor is that, metaphorically speaking, chauvinism is hiding under the judicial robes; the hopelessness of both Gowan's emasculation and the legal system's inefficacy is thereby dramatized. These are all secondary; however, Gowan is present because Gavin's design is that Temple's confession should transform him as well as her. That is, her words make him aware of his failures and mistakes. Temple's confession to enjoying her stay at the brothel confirms what he already knew as he had earlier indicated to Gavin; her confession to adultery gives substance to his suspicions that she was having lovers and that he might, in fact, not be the father of the two children; Temple's confession to complicity in the murder of her daughter shocks him, too, into a world where "people anguished and suffer, not simply do things they shouldn't." Gowan is forced, through Gavin's manipulation of events, to realize that marrying Temple and abstaining from liquor did not set things right with Temple, society, or himself. Gavin does not engage in a Socratic dialogue with Gowan, but he does lead this character to the same kind of moral realizations as he does Temple. He is appropriately her male counterpart, as has been pointed out by Donald Petesch:

Gowan Stevens is an ideal companion for Temple Drake. As Temple's name is ironic, Gowan is a debased Sir Gawain. Gawain--noted for his hunting and his embodiment of the best virtues of knighthood: bravery, honor, faith, and chastity--becomes Gowan

[in Sanctuary] on a hunt for liquor. Like Temple, Gowan too is very much the creature of the "looks" of others, so that failure to "measure up" exposes him to shame.⁷⁸

Gavin has another important function to carry out with Nancy Mannigoe. In Requiem for a Nun he is not the white do-gooder out to save the innocent black, as he had been in Intruder in the Dust after he learned that Lucas Beauchamp was indeed innocent. The primary reason is that Nancy is not innocent; she has committed the murder. "Guilty, God," she says, "Guilty."⁷⁹ Gavin's function here is more closely akin to his role in Light in August, where he had explained Joe Christmas's motivation for Joanna Burden's murder. In this earlier role he succeeds in explaining much of the murderer's behavior. Here he fails; and can aid Nancy only by joining in the chorus of the gospel hymns as she sings from the prison. He cannot save Nancy Mannigoe's life, let alone her soul.

As a matter of precision, it probably should be argued that Temple's savior--to the extent the term can be used at all--is Nancy Mannigoe, not Gavin Stevens. Nancy has freely and willingly made the ultimate sacrifice of her life in order to save Temple. Why, though, did she do this? Some have viewed it simply as another enactment of the sacrificial archetype. Others have made much of Nancy's race. In this view, Nancy as Negro is merely another victim of white racism. At least one critic, Pauline Degenfelder, has seen her as playing both

⁷⁸Donald A. Petesch, "Temple Drake: Faulkner's Mirror for the Social Order," Studies in American Fiction 17(1979), p. 47n.

⁷⁹William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 47. Subsequent references from the text are credited parenthetically with the page number.

roles: "Through Nancy's role as sacrificial scapegoat, Faulkner is again providing a modern variation of a Southern plantation tradition: the white male using the black woman to siphon off his lust in order to insure the inviolability of the white female."⁸⁰

I doubt that Nancy's blackness has this much centrality in the play. I do not deny that her blackness insures racial overtones; however, were we to go through the play and extract all references to it, the work would still stand more or less as it is. Nancy's condition as a "dope-fiend, nigger whore" complements the moral condition of Temple Drake and stands in contrast to the social aspirations of Mrs. Gowan Stevens. Nancy's status and condition in society symbolize all the bad qualities of Temple's nature. Viewed from this perspective, it is Temple's past and her immoral behavior which bring about the death of the innocent child: It is not so much that Nancy Mannigoe is a child-killer as it is that Temple Drake's evil side is capable of and has in fact committed such an act. Moreover, she is in the midst of deserting her children when the reprehensible murder occurs; symbolically again, murder, an attempt to undo--to void--the life of another, is closely akin to desertion, which has the same offshoots: to undo and void the existence of one in another's life. Nancy rightly understands the desertion for what it morally is: murder.

A few comments can also be made about Gavin's relationship to the governor. First of all, they are on very close, if not intimate, terms. One would think that, even in the slow-paced life of Mississippi

⁸⁰Degenfelder, p. 558.

in 1938, the governor would have better things to do than permit his chambers to be turned into the scene for a sob story from a soap opera at 2:00 a. m. That is, it is indicated several times in the play that Nancy's death is a certainty and that there is no chance of reprieve. Evidently, the governor has never considered it seriously, not because he would not, had Gavin made such a request, but because Gavin's request was of a different nature. Gavin is not working to save Nancy's life; he is working to save Temple's soul. Consequently, asking for a reprieve is never important; getting Temple to explain why the governor should grant it is.

Generally and rightfully, the governor's role has been interpreted as the fulfillment of man's attempt toward institutionalized justice. Faulkner's stage directions in the introduction to Act II invite such a perspective. The author decorates the governor's office with "official emblems of the badge of the state and office, the blind scales of justice, a flag, and plaques with Latin inscriptions." We are also told that this man, one Henry, who presently occupies the "ultimate seat of justice," is "symbolic too." (98-99) The governor, like everyone else in the play, is not so much a character as he is a symbol. He is "ultimate" only in terms of this world; he does, in some temporal way, hold the power of life and death over Nancy Mannigoe's body. He is, perhaps, the best that humanity through its legal and social institutions, has to offer. Perhaps Faulkner's implication is that the best man can do is to imitate palely the existing, higher laws. Whatever the case, it is clear that Gavin is on friendly terms with him, and that the governor is doing him a favor. That the governor's

presence is symbolic is also reinforced by the fact that he has virtually nothing to say in the play. He does ask questions and occasionally say, "Go on"; but he is never developed as a character because he is not one; he is a symbol of the ultimate justice of man. As such, he is a rather good one; at least he is not corrupt and merely waiting for a bribe. This ultimate justice of man is necessary; as Hawthorne pointed out in The Scarlet Letter, we must have a prison and a cemetery in order to have a society. That is, human institutions are necessary, but even the best of them are inadequate. The governor is neither a jailkeeper nor a sexton, but he does serve a necessary, similar role.

As the scene unfolds he actually becomes something of a side-kick to Gavin; legal justice helps advance the cause of human conscience. The governor obviously knows enough of the story beforehand that he can ask the right questions at the right time. It is no wonder that Temple eventually "confesses"; at least she tells "everything," whether or not that is tantamount to confession. Walter Brylowski has questioned the validity of the process which Gavin enacts: "Temple's confession is not equivalent to redemption, however. Forced by Gavin Stevens, it is as far as the rational-empiric mode can take her, stripping off the mask but leaving her with doubts as to its efficacy."⁸¹

Nancy Mannigoe and Governor Henry, as characters, exist as symbols of some quality or force working upon Temple's conscience. The governor is the legal influence upon her nature--the rational attempt of man to codify what behavior ought to be. Nancy is the symbolic

⁸¹Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1968), p. 179.

outgrowth of what happens when the legal system, the order of society, is not followed. As Temple says to Nancy toward the very end of the play, "Why do you and my little baby both have to suffer just because I decided to go to a baseball game eight years ago?" (237) The answer is that Nancy's condition in fact as a "dope-fiend, nigger whore" exactly represents Temple's moral condition although literally she is not addicted to drugs, black, nor a whore--at least she is not a whore in the same sense as Nancy, whose teeth have been kicked out on a public street when she demanded that the deacon of the Baptist church pay for services rendered. Temple's daughter, of course, is the sacrifice--that is, the literal, physical outgrowth of her body is destroyed by the symbolic moral corruption of her soul. Nancy's function exactly parallels that of the governor. They are not vitiated characters, which is evident in the descriptions of them. Too, their rather short, clipped dialogue supports this interpretation. Faulkner is not interested in developing them to any extent as characters because in this play characters are not at issue with one another; Temple is at issue with herself. It is significant that her daughter--literally an issue from her body--is destroyed by her immorality.

As a victim of racial oppression, Nancy Mannigoe does fulfill the requirements of a sacrificial scapegoat. These words, however, do not adequately explain the murder of the child. Viewing her as a symbolic outgrowth and embodiment of Temple Drake's earlier actions and incumbent moral condition does. Temple's question is actually an internal side step away from this truth in her struggle. Nancy and the

baby do not suffer and die because Temple went to a ballgame eight years ago. Going to ballgames does not result in such consequences. They must die because Temple's defiance of order and morality in sneaking off to that game has continued to grow throughout her life. This pattern of non-compliance has magnified in time: ballgame, bootlegger's, whorehouse, adultery, desertion, murder.

Nancy's second function in Requiem for a Nun is sometimes glossed over. She not only kills a baby but also she makes religious pronouncements at the end of the play. Her message about salvation has something to do with faith, belief, and suffering. Most critics have usually come up with this formula: we must have faith and believe that our suffering will provide our salvation. Those reading Nancy as a Christ-figure quickly apply her plight to this equation. All of her talk about faith, belief, suffering, and salvation do have a Christian context; but it is a mistake to try to make them into a Christian message or theme. In the first place, it truly is not conventional Christianity. I know of no Christian denomination which gives even passing credence to suffering as a prerequisite or necessity for salvation. Certainly black Protestants from Mississippi would talk mostly about mercy and grace, not suffering. At this point a reader might do well to remember an earlier Yoknapatawpha Christian, who certainly "believed" by anyone's reckoning: McEachern in Light in August.

One is also tempted to say that Faulkner's point here is the tried and true "man will endure" motif. If, however, Faulkner meant "endure," he would have said it. Suffering is Nancy's sermon, not

Faulkner's underlying theme. There is no reason for the author to use a vaguely synonymous term. That he meant suffer is further emphasized when Temple quotes the New Testament passage "Suffer the little children." Here she diverts the intended meaning of suffer (that is, "permit") into "anguish." Temple also uses the word as it applies to her self. Speaking to the governor, she says:

What we came here and waked you up at two o'clock in the morning for is just to give Temple Drake a good fair honest chance to suffer—you know: just anguish for the sake of anguish, like that Russian or somebody who wrote a whole book about suffering, not suffering for or about anything, just suffering, like somebody unconscious not really breathing for anything but just breathing. Or maybe that's wrong too and nobody really cares, suffers, any more about suffering than they do about truth or justice or Temple Drake's shame or Nancy Mannigoe's worthless nigger life.

(115-6)

The passage reveals a number of interesting points. First of all, Temple relates suffering to anguish, not to endurance. It is evident that in Faulkner's mind they are two entirely different concepts. Here, Nancy Mannigoe, like Dilsey, must endure her suffering; but they are two different things, not one and the same. Second, Temple is pleading for a "good honest fair chance to suffer"; the foremost implication is that she never has. This must be true because of her sheltered role as the protected female in a society which strenuously venerated chastity of the white female. Society has protected her; she has never been permitted to experience the consequences of her sins because her father or Gowan has sheltered her. She seems to be begging for a chance to "force the moment to its crisis," as Eliot wrote in Prufrock. She is tired of her station in life and wants to pay for her actions so she can transcend her shame and alter her condition. Third, suffering as a moral precept, exists in the same category as truth and justice. She

is subconsciously referring to Gavin's truth and the governor's justice; suffering is not so much an experience as it is a condition of spiritual existence. Temple wants to achieve suffering in the same way she would achieve truth and justice. Finally, the entire context of her expression centers around "Nancy Mannigoe's worthless nigger life." Nancy has not been protected from suffering; as Pauline Degenfelder said, she functions to "siphon off" the white man's lust "in order to insure the inviolability of the white female." In this manner Nancy is most vilely victimized, but so is Temple. Both women are prevented from achieving any moral stature within themselves because of their inherited roles and identities. Nancy does pay for Temple's sins, but this does not exclude Temple from paying for them, too. At least her intuition tells her that she ought to, scapegoat or no scapegoat.

At this point I want to return to my basic interpretation of Nancy's character. She exists as the symbol of guilt and corruption in Temple's nature, and as such is the vessel of Temple's suffering. Conventional reading has it that all this suffering somehow does save her somewhere along the line, at least by the end of the play. I am not convinced. For one thing, she and Gavin at the end are still asking questions of Nancy; they seem to have concluded very little. Gavin does make a pronouncement, and Temple says, "We are all, Doomed. Damned." To which Gavin replies, "Of course we are. Hasn't He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?" (245) Anyone can see the negativity of this statement. Temple has come to acknowledge, confess, and understand her condition and behavior. Moreover, that understanding is the first important part of any rectification that might

occur, but understanding is not transcending; recognition of guilt cannot be equivalent with salvation, even when it is replete with suffering and allusions to sacrificial scapegoats. At the end of Requiem the best we can hope for is the possibility of salvation; but there is no guarantee of it.

At no point in the play does Faulkner validate Nancy's dictate to "believe," "Believe what?" is Temple's immediate question. Nancy's answer is not an answer but a mechanical response: "Believe," she says again. (243) Temple's question remains unanswered. The Christian answer to all of this would be that we are all damned (as He has been telling us for two thousand years) unless we believe in Christ. Faulkner does not suggest this answer. Nor does he reintroduce the concept of suffering. One possibility is that he is saying that belief as a process is what saves us from despair, guilt, and corruption. Faulkner may also have had in mind the New Testament stricture that we not "believe a lie and be damned." Actually, though, he seems to be more at home with the converse of this: because we are damned we believe lies. At any rate, the antidote to immorality and guilt is process, not transformation. Nancy is indicating that continued, ever-present belief is the answer, moreso than achievement of moral status and purgation of guilt. As for suffering, Nancy stands as an example of a course not to pursue. Her suffering is self-defined and self-fulfilled, but is not a means of salvation.

Actually, Faulkner's impetus in writing Requiem for a Nun had little to do with preaching moral resuscitation, or even preservation. The problem goes back to Sanctuary where, as Leslie Fiedler has written,

in Temple Drake Faulkner is dealing with the "desecration of a cult object." As Degenfelder says, "In attacking the chivalric code of the South, Faulkner has chipped away at the pedestalled White Virgin who is its icon"82 Temple, too, like Nancy, Gavin, and the governor, exists as much as a symbol as she does a character. Moreover, in moving from Sanctuary to Requiem for a Nun Faulkner took Temple from fornication to adultery--not from damnation to salvation. Temple is the physical embodiment of the moral code of the Old South. Her born lot in life is to live out the special role for women, which required that she remain chaste. In return for this chastity, society--the men around her--were to pamper and protect her from the incivilities of the surrounding environment and its immorality. The origins of such thinking probably came out of some sort of original necessity for preserving the purity of offspring in an agrarian state, as well as the Medieval chivalric code.

In Requiem for a Nun all of this is very much in play. Gowan, who had helped Temple buck the protection of her father, willingly assumes the role of husband-protector of the young girl whose sojourn in the whorehouse he had helped secure. Temple still plays the same part in Requiem as she had in the earlier work. She is not restored, purged, or cleansed, but remains inescapably a desecrated shrine to a dead order. This is her character by definition; the result is the internal clashing of Temple Drake and Mrs. Gowan Stevens. On the one hand, she would live a chaste life; on the other, she has enjoyed her stay at

82Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Dell, 1967), p. 323. (Degenfelder, p. 546)

the whorehouse and has carried on an affair with Pete while married to Gowan. She is fixed in the same moral condition as Caddy in The Sound and the Fury and Blanche DuBois in A Streetcar Named Desire. As the last refuge of the moral code of the Old South, she is its corrupted vessel. Her conflict is between being what she is and what she is supposed to be. Requiem for a Nun is a continuation of Sanctuary in that Temple remains in the same situation, perhaps worsened. Faulkner's purpose has been to show where she is a few years later: the same damned place. There is drama to be sure, but no regeneration. In fact, to restore Temple to society as a Mrs. Gowan Stevens, a woman of the world who has come home to lead a pure life, a Temple cleansed from blemish, is unthinkable. No restoration of this temple occurs. Temple achieves understanding about herself, legal and moral justice, Nancy's guilt, and Gavin's truth; but, as stated earlier, reaching understanding cannot be considered the same as achieving salvation, or even suffering. Temple has wanted the "right" to suffer, but nothing in the text indicates that she ever gets it.

It has generally been assumed that Nancy is the nun alluded to in the title of the play. She does, in an obvious way, minister to Temple's needs and work to accomplish a spiritual transformation in Temple's life. The term probably is most applicable because Nancy is the person whose death is immediate; hence the play, as a death song, becomes hers. Moreover, Faulkner himself confirmed at the University of Virginia that Nancy was that nun.⁸³ The author, however, often

⁸³Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 223.

played games with the critics and, in that sense at least, anything he said is suspect.

The word nun appears only once in the work. At the end of the third prose interlude, "The Jail," the curious phrases "demon-nun and angel-witch" (225) occur in one of Faulkner's discussions about the girl who has scratched her name in the glass window of the courthouse. These words are not connected to either Nancy or Temple; however, the oxymorons do indicate that Faulkner associated nun with demon. He is simply showing that you can have both at once. I wonder, however, if Temple is not the nun. Nuns are supposed to be chaste as a foremost mark of their character. So is Temple. Nuns are to be chaste as part of their religious vows. Temple is supposed to be chaste as part of her marriage vows. Temple falters in two ways; in Sanctuary she had not preserved her virginity for her wedding night; in Requiem we learn of her adultery; that is, of her failure of chastity in marriage. Moreover, on both counts she has enjoyed violating the moral order. Readers have always assumed Nancy was the nun because she administers to Temple's needs. Temple should more clearly be associated with the word because of the expected purity of both. The word requiem similarly has direct application to Temple. Faulkner is chiming the death toll for chastity in the Old South. The temple of that chastity is Temple Drake, a "desecrated cult object," as Fiedler called her. But it is the death toll for more than this. We are told in Sanctuary that Gowan had read Temple's name on a lavatory wall. This, in itself, does not represent the fall of the society which Temple represents; however, when Temple starts leading her life so that her name appropriately belongs there,

it is assured. In Requiem, the problem is compounded in that even the pretensions of hypocrisy are stripped away. Temple confesses, but confession does not in any way rebuild the temple. Faulkner is not trying to purge Temple, nor is he trying to restore that old order, which he recognized had passed. It is a theme he had dealt with earlier in The Sound and the Fury. The child Caddy's underpants remain soiled, symbolically representing the last of the misbegotten order. Interestingly enough, Faulkner indirectly connects Temple with Caddy. In Requiem we are told that Temple could have escaped from the whorehouse at any time by climbing down the drain pipe. Caddy's daughter, of course, had escaped from her bedroom to run away with the man from the circus by climbing down the drain pipe. Faulkner associates these women with the same phallic symbol.

Temple is not the only person who falls from the graces of the order. Gowan, too, representing male hierarchy and chauvinism, is as spotted as Temple. His initial problem, in Sanctuary, had been his inability to hold his liquor like a Southern gentleman. He was expected, under the old order, to drink great amounts of whiskey and yet act as though he had not. He fails, not only at drinking like a gentleman, but at protecting Temple, whom he is escorting, from the forces which would rob her of her chastity. He then tries to rectify his mistakes on both counts by abstaining from alcohol and marrying Temple. Gowan, as surely as Temple, tries to live up to the expected role. He does not, however, dominate and control Temple but becomes a weak and ineffectual cuckold in a world where chivalry is as dead as chastity. Moreover, the origin of that basic tenet which required

the preservation of chastity in order to insure passing on the hierarchy to one's heirs is under question. Gowan is not sure that his children are his; and, Faulkner never provides an answer either for Gowan or the reader. Probably the implication is that even Temple did not know, which indicates greater plurality in her affairs. Gowan, too, is a symbolic character. When he hides behind the curtains in the governor's chambers, it is not so much Gowan Stevens, husband at fault, but it is the symbolic, diminished yet appropriate, stance of chivalry in the society. Gowan fails to carry out every major expectation of him as Southern gentleman: he does not protect Temple; he does not produce male offspring which are unquestionably his own; he does not provide for his wife's sexual needs; he does not dominate and control her. Gowan's chivalry belongs in the closet. Faulkner is exposing the weaknesses, faults, and decay of both the Southern male and female.

Nancy Mannigoe's role as black woman is similarly violated. She is supposed to remain subservient; but Temple has not hired her to be servant in the house, but because they both "speak the same language." (105) Temple recognizes Nancy as her (im)moral equal; all the old ideas about superiority are gone. Nancy, as black servant, is at the absolute bottom of both the class and caste systems. Her social station in life is just about the same as Dilsey's in The Sound and the Fury and "That Evening Sun." Both women are servants in a house which cannot stand because of the moral decay. To say that Nancy and Dilsey occupy equal social status, however, does not imply moral equality. Dilsey clearly conducts herself in an admirable way. Perhaps she does occasionally think about spitting in the white man's soup, but she herself endured

rather through the self-sustained preservation of her moral integrity. Nancy Mannigoe does not. Nancy, like Temple, has made bad moral choices; both embrace sin. Nancy could have led a life like Dilsey's. She could have cared for the white man's children and preserved her own integrity without resorting to prostitution and drugs. My point is that Dilsey and Nancy occupy identical social positions, but they do not reckon with that position in the same way. Nancy, as is evident in "That Evening Sun," has used her social position as something of an excuse, more than an explanation, for her drug use and prostitution. Nancy is not a "victim" because of social circumstances to any greater extent than Dilsey; consequently, she is not any more of a societal scapegoat than Dilsey. She ordains herself for this role.

Temple, the revered product of the white aristocracy, sins for the opposite reason, although both characters have entered life with roles which prevent them from establishing fulfilling identities of their own. Nancy, as victim, is both literally and symbolically down-trodden by society via the foot of the deacon of the Baptist church. Temple's chains are her chastity belt, placed on her by a father who left the care of the keys to Gowan. It is interesting that society keeps Temple on her pedestal even after her downfall, so long as she is willing to maintain pretensions by carrying out the role of Mrs. Gowan Stevens. Their marriage does satisfy the requirements of the code, so long as she does not succumb to scandal or flaunt her violations. In fact, the sanctity of the T/temple seems to be intact so long as Gowan is willing to maintain, even hypocritically, his own role as chauvinistic defender-protector-husband. In "The Golden Dome"

interlude when Faulkner describes the naming of the capital city, he says of Stonewall Jackson:

. . . the old duellist, the brawling lean fierce mangy durable old loon who set the well-being of the Nation above the White House, and the health of his new political party above either, and above them all set, not his wife's honor, but the principle that honor must be defended whether it was or not since, defended, it was, whether or not.

(94)

Gowan Stevens is not Stonewall Jackson. Moreover, at the end of the play and through the guidance of Gavin Stevens, both characters are through playing out their dead roles. Gavin's pronouncement to Gowan and Temple at the end of the play, "Of course we are [all damned]. Hasn't He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?" (225) can be viewed positively at all only if there is hope through understanding. Both characters do come to see through their problems; but as I said earlier, understanding cannot be equated with salvation or even resolution. If they are to be saved from their own natures, which "stink," as Temple repeatedly says, it will be through overcoming the tenets of the code, not through hypocritically maintaining the required roles. The death song is sung by Nancy, not for her.

Faulkner, though, has not been merely content to indict the code, try it, find it guilty, and sing its death song. He also brings in two other factors in the demise: legal justice and history. These are entirely discussed in the prose interludes which serve to locate Temple and Gowan in time and show the origin of all the problems. Much has been written about the stolen federal lock incident as related in "The Courthouse," and I will not elaborate on it again. It must be pointed out, however, that it is Gavin Stevens, County Attorney, who

now bears the keys to that original lock, long since passed into lore, yet the ramifications of which live on as surely as the death of Nancy Mannigoe. Legal justice is not dead in Yoknapatawpha County, nor is it in hiding; it is simply inadequate at its best and corrupt at its worst.

In the second prose interlude Faulkner even more severely and explicitly attacks the faults of the system when he moves the scene to Jackson. Again, I will repeat only generally what has already been said in detail at least a score of times. Faulkner's feelings about legal justice had been expressed in the first prose interlude. He does not take up this theme again; instead, he deals with the history of Jackson, the state, and the South. His intentions are to present a dramatic backdrop against which we can measure, in terms of time and history and society, Temple's individual immorality against the panaromic milieu at large. As Hugh Ruppensburg has said, "History thus becomes not only the medium which defines the moral dilemmas in the present, but also the source of knowledge and human examples which enables them to seek solutions and understand themselves."⁸⁴

Gavin himself does not grow much in the middle of all this history. As stated earlier, Requiem for a Nun is not so much populated by characters as it is by symbols, or at least, "embodiments" of ideas. Lawrance Thompson has seen the characters as performing in a moral allegory;

The specifics of the drama do not provide enough dramatic flesh to conceal the underlying skeleton of the allegorical morality play;

⁸⁴Hugh Michael Ruppensburg, "The Narrative Structure of Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun," Mississippi Quarterly, 31(1978), p. 392.

Temple is cast in the awkward role of Everyman; Gowan Stevens plays the role of Conscience; Nancy is an uncomfortable Christ; and the Governor only clumsily symbolizes the ultimate Judge.⁸⁵

This is too extremely overstated since there is no evidence that Faulkner had such an allegory in mind. His point, however, that the characters do not exist as persons is well taken. Temple is fallen Southern womanhood; Gowan is the fallen Southern knight; Nancy is a symbolic outgrowth of Temple's immorality and thereby, also, fallen womanhood; the governor is the failed attempt of man's legal system to bring moral justice to society. That leaves Gavin, who is also more of a symbol than a real character in this work; yet whose complexity does not permit such quick and precise categorization.

To begin with, Gavin is something of a counterforce to Nancy. In so far as Nancy is a symbolic outgrowth of Temple's corruption, Gavin is her rational resistance to that corruption; he is at least an attempt to take a step in the right direction. Gavin also remains a lawyer, in the sense of pleading her side of the story before the judge in order to explain and interpret her behavior. In so doing it would be a mistake to assume that his interpretations are necessarily the correct ones, even though Faulkner deliberately creates an aura of rightness about them. That is, most of the time Gavin is right on target in explaining Temple's and Gowan's actions. He is probably off base, however, on the two or three issues central to the theme. He understands that Temple enjoyed the whorehouse; he understands her adultery and would-be elopement with Pete. He also is attuned to such

⁸⁵Lawrance Thompson, William Faulkner (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 132.

things as her need for a drink. In conversation, he knows her thoughts so well that he is always a step ahead of her. Nothing is ever revealed to Gavin that he does not already know; instead he always solicits revelations from Temple to make her admit these facts. He does have all the information; but his final answers to Temple are not necessarily right. They are not Faulkner's theme, only Gavin's reply.

At the end of the play Temple is basically in the same condition as at the beginning. The only real differences are that her husband now has definite proof of her adultery, having heard it from the horse's mouth, and she has lost a night's sleep. Gavin has more or less preached salvation through confession. He is erroneous here, as are the numerous critics who have failed to make a distinction between confession and self-exposure. Confession implies some amount or evidence of contrition. If Temple were even vaguely contrite, she would then be subject to the suffering she pleads for. But she is not. What Gavin secures from her is the saying of words: she verbally acknowledges what she has done, and, to an extent, why she did so; but no, this is not quite confession. Moreover, to whom is she confessing? None of the possible answers will work. She is not confessing to the governor-judge who from the start realizes, as do all involved, that the problem is out of his domain. She is hardly confessing to Gowan, whose presence she is unaware of. She is not confessing to Gavin, who is satisfied with merely hearing the words. Temple could say, "Father, I have sinned" all day and it would still not be a confession since there is no remorse. Confession unto salvation starts by verbally admitting one's wrong-doings to an agent who is somehow concerned with forgiveness

and restoration. Hence, one could confess to his victim; or, one could confess to God or a priest acting as God's agent; or, in one sense, a person could confess to himself had he sinned against himself. None of these apply to Temple. The only other, even remote, possibility is Nancy; but she is not confessing to this character either--Nancy already knows and has always known of Temple's condition, actions, and motivations. All Gavin accomplishes is the saying of words--but this should not be confused with confession. She exposes herself, but there is no confession involved, explicit or implicit, external or internal, permanent or temporary.

Requiem for a Nun is the pivotal work about Gavin's career. By this time in his development he has completely left behind his role of lawyer-detective; he is hardly a moral agent in a universe where criminals wear black hats. On the other hand, he is not yet a moral person in the sense that he himself is in moral dilemmas; his own behavior is not yet brought into question. In this intermediate stage he probes the actions of others toward their improvement. In Intruder in the Dust he is a success; he does save Chick from despair and he guides him through the central crisis of his development into manhood. In Requiem for a Nun Gavin fails; he does not lead Temple to any reconciliation with society. At the end all go back to the same house from which they came. Gowan and Temple will remain as they were: desecrated entities of a fallen morality. They will not divorce--Temple will continue her adulteries and Gowan will hypocritically maintain the correct air of Southern gentlemen. The whole event has been rather like pulling a false tooth which has become uncomfortable; after getting it out the

only thing to do is fill up the hole again with another false tooth. Hypocritical propriety is the order of the day.

Gavin, here as guide, fails to save Temple from herself. I think, however, this is to be expected since the sanctity of the temple cannot be restored; she is by definition of the fallen order; and, since as Faulkner well knew, that order was not about to be restored, he had to leave her that way. She is a symbol of fallen, Southern womanhood--and she cannot be restored to society because that society is hypocritical and corrupt. But Gavin tries anyway--he probes the conscience of Southern womanhood, doing the best he can. In Intruder in the Dust there was yet hope that the racial problems and injustices of the South could, one way or another, be rectified. In Requiem for a Nun there is no hope for Southern womanhood; the theme of the play is its death. Chick had violated Lucas's dignity as a person but he was not a member of the lynch mob. Temple, in Sanctuary and in Requiem for a Nun, had admitted the violation of the temple; but she remains violated.

What Gavin learns in Requiem is that the old order is dead and not subject to resurrection. Southern womanhood had given way to the licentiousness of a coy flapper. And while nothing could insure the sustained endurance of that flapper, certainly no one would seriously predict a return to Melanie Wilkes's genteel womanhood in Gone with the Wind (220) not merely because it depicted Southern womanhood in an undesirable way, but because it had done so legitimately; the movie demonstrated that such gentility was passe.

In Intruder in the Dust Gavin had learned that anyone is capable of putting his brother in quick sand. This is lessened, however, by the fact that while "anyone could," only Crawford Gowrie did. Not so in Requiem for a Nun, where the human condition simply stinks. In Intruder in the Dust it could possibly--perhaps--be reduced to the miry depths in the mind of young Chick; in Requiem it simply is that way in the body of Temple Drake.

There is great possibility for stagnation in Gavin's present role. He is permitted a certain complacency so long as he does not actually commit faults himself. The danger, as always, is that by remaining stationary one does not grow. In a sense Gavin smugly tells Temple what to do. He continues to wring forth confession, yet when he gets it all there is a "So what?" feeling. Gavin does not have any answers for Temple. He functions as a defunct moral guide of an immoral order. A demolished Temple must be rebuilt, not restored. Gavin is attempting, as he did with Chick, to restore the old order by respecting it. This does not work, for Faulkner is one step ahead of him. The decline and fall of the South is, whatever else, history. And while history does live on in the present, even God Himself, let alone Gavin, cannot restore lost virginity. That is, God does not undo the past so far as we know.

Requiem for a Nun manifests only gloom for mankind. Nancy's sacrifice does not save Temple; it results only in the deaths of the baby and herself. Gowan's chivalry is certainly a lost cause. The governor's law manuals have nothing to offer; and, finally, even Gavin's attempt at rectification through confession fails. Once again, this

failure is assured because the characters are symbolic. For Faulkner to have permitted the salvation of Temple Drake would be for him to have indicated the restoration of the moral code of the Old South. This was not to be. As Peter Swiggart has said, "Temple must cease to represent the corrupt Southern aristocracy, and become an ordinary sinner, before her past sins can be effectively redeemed."⁸⁶ This never happens.

At the end of the play all realize this lack of restoration. It is the greatest failure, to date, of Gavin's career. One can almost hear Temple saying, "All right, Uncle Gavin, I told everything. Now can I go home?" Such an expression would be in logical accord with her earlier statement that "Temple Drake liked evil." (135) She utters in the past tense, but remains aware of its applicability in the present and future. Temple perceives evil as something that, once succumbed to, is unrectifiable: "You've got to be already prepared to resist, say no to it, long before you even know what it is." (134) As Cleanth Brooks said, "This is a comment shrewd enough to have come from the lips of a Jesuit confessor."⁸⁷

At the very end, however, Faulkner does not focus upon words, but symbol. He concludes with stage directions that refer us once again to the lock:

⁸⁶Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), pp. 182-3.

⁸⁷Cleanth Brooks, The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 139.

They exit. The door closes in, clashes, the clash and clang of the key as the Jailor locks it again; the three pairs of footsteps sound and begin to fade in the outer corridor.

(245)

Faulkner is not locking up Nancy Mannigoe and returning a restored T/temple to society. For one thing, Nancy had already been removed from the scene and returned to her cell shortly before. No, he is not locking up Nancy, "the dope-fiend, nigger-whore"; he is locking up the principles-principals of the action. Notice that "the door closes in," as if under its own volition, and the clashing and clanging dramatically emphasize and resonate of that clashing and clanging of the original lock "borrowed" from the United States mail pouch. It is still failing to carry out its function. Moreover, there are three pairs of footsteps, not merely one. Temple does not go home alone, of course, but in the company of Gowan and Gavin; fallen womanhood is again under the escort and protection of fallen manhood and failed legal justice.

In moving from Vinson Gowrie to Temple Drake, Faulkner went from the lowest of the poor-white trash to the highest of the wealthy aristocrats. In both places he found the same immorality. Overt murder of brother is equivalent to covert desertion/murder of child. In both instances the social order and the individuals who people society are at fault. Gavin, here acting as a symbolic character, learns this. He is now ready to return to a Jefferson inhabited by Snopeses.

CHAPTER V

THE TOWN

And Uncle Gavin explained that: a sanctuary, a rationality of perspective, which animals, humans too, not merely reach but earn by passing through unbearable emotional states like furious rage or furious fear. . . .

--The Town, p. 27

In the early 1950's when Faulkner returned to the Snopeses of The Hamlet (1940), he made two important changes: first, as indicated by the titles of the two novels, he moved the location of the story from Frenchmen's Bend to Jefferson, i. e., from the hamlet to the town; second, he incorporated Gavin Stevens into the action. Ostensibly, Faulkner's main purpose in continuing the Snopes story is to trace the rise of Flem Snopes in the society of Jefferson. This, more than any other theme or motif, holds the work together. There is another side to the story, however. In order to show Flem's advances in society, that society must be alive and thriving so that Flem can maneuver in it. When Faulkner selected a family to represent the society of Jefferson, he chose the Stevenses (rather than the Compsons or Sartorises, for example), and his focal point within that family is Gavin. The result is that The Town, while it remains superficially a novel about Flem Snopes, is much more concerned with Gavin. Consider that Gavin narrates a little less than one half of the book, and that he himself is more or less the subject of discussion in almost all of the remaining portions. Flem makes only a few, brief appearances and is never the narrator.

As Faulkner shows Flem's advances in society he actually gives much more effort to depicting that society, that is, Gavin and company, than he did Flem. The major reason is that Flem's characterization, motivations, and behavior had all been established in The Hamlet. Readers are never curious about what Flem is, only about what he will do next. We are never aware of any further development of Flem's character because, as pointed out by Woodrow Stroble, if it exists it is always "submerged beneath the consciousness of the three narrators."⁸⁸ The author relies on what already existed and proceeds to show the effects on Jefferson. Gavin's behavior and character have also been previously established, but they have not been fulfilled. The best statement of his role in The Town was made in 1980 by Lyall Powers, who sees him basically as the best possible agent of the towns folk;

Their best representative is Gavin Stevens, something of a complement to Manfred, who, as he fails Eula through basic cowardice, also aids Flem's progress, thus helping to call down upon Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County the general plague of Snopesism. Worse, he lends the deceptive cloak of chivalric honor to their shared cowardice.⁸⁹

Again, Faulkner's decision to use the Stevens family is an appropriate one. Previously, they have not been subject to or participated in the corruption of society as a whole. For Flem to try to bribe Quentin Compson, as he does Gavin on two occasions in The Town, would cast the whole book in a different context. Similarly, to have Caddy invite Eula Snopes to a social engagement would not have the

⁸⁸Woodrow Stroble, "Flem Snopes: A Crazy Mirror," in Faulkner: The Unappeased Imagination, ed. by Glenn O. Carey (Troy, New York: Whitston Company, 1980), p. 205.

⁸⁹Lyall H. Powers, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 222.

same effect as it does for Margaret Mallison to invite the adulteress to one, and so on. In choosing the Stevenses, Faulkner selected the most moral people in town; he wanted to show that Flem's presence and conduct would penetrate to the very recesses of the dormant immorality of even them. Gavin, Chick, Margaret, Charles, and even Judge Stevens--all are placed in moral dilemmas as a result of Flem's very presence and encroaching Snopesism.

Gavin, however, is the central character who experiences most of the difficulties. As a result of Flem's existence, Gavin undergoes a series of personal moral dilemmas with Flem, Eula, Manfred, and Linda. Gavin has reached the final step in his moral development; he now becomes, or at least he has the ability and opportunity for becoming, what I have previously called a moral person. With each of these four characters he must repeatedly make decisions of right or wrong, good or evil, as these words apply to his own conduct. Previously, this has not been the case except on two minor occasions. In "Go Down, Moses" Gavin's do-gooder appearance at the wake for Butch Beauchamp has been suspect; too, in Intruder in the Dust his initial failure to see Lucas Beauchamp's innocence was a fault. Neither of these incidents, however, was presented as a moral dilemma, but more as an overt exposure of his weaknesses. In the two Snopes novels, Gavin is in a different moral realm where he seriously, for the first time, probes his own heart and conduct. We now have not only introspection, but also morality- immorality in the life of the County Attorney.

His first episode is with Manfred de Spain. Gavin decides, for whatever reason, to take up a comic crusade against Manfred's chivalrous

adultery with Eula-"Guinivere." The problem, and the comedy, is that while Manfred does qualify for the imagined specifications of a twentieth century, Old South, remanticized Lancelot, Gavin is no Arthur. In Requiem for a Nun Faulkner had sung the death song for chivalry and chastity in the South. He now changes the serious tone of the original theme. The scene is moved from the governor's chambers to the public streets of Jefferson; the overriding symbol is not the federal mail lock but the cut-off on Manfred's automobile; instead of Temple's adulterous sufferings we have, as it were, Eula's adulterous pleasures; instead of a dead daughter we have a dead mother; Gavin, as midwife, becomes Gavin the would-be, self-appointed, overweening, white knight.

Faulkner describes Gavin in this new role as a twenty-three-year old adolescent. His infatuation with Eula is natural enough, but his conduct, while it can be explained, cannot be excused. Gavin's internal struggle occurs because he cannot rationalize two facts of existence into truth. Charles Mallison identifies the first of these when he says, "Nor were we really in favor of adultery, sin; we were simply in favor of De Spain and Eula Snopes, for what Uncle Gavin called the divinity of simple, unadulterated uninhibited immortal lust which they represented."⁹⁰ The second is a concept almost exactly repeated from Requiem for a Nun: "What he [Gavin] was doing was simply defending forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not." (76) Gavin, as part of the town, vicariously participates in and gives sanction (on

⁹⁰William Faulkner, The Town (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 15. Subsequent references from the text are credited parenthetically with the page number.

some subconscious level) to Eula's adultery; yet he is at odds with himself because of the defined loss of chastity and virtue. He is again trying to purify the temple; and he fails a second time. Southern womanhood cannot be restored either by securing a confession from Temple Drake or by filing down the tooth of a rake the better to puncture De Spain's tire.

Gavin's conduct toward Manfred is humorously despicable. He appropriately elicits the help of two actual adolescents, his teen-age cousin Gowan and his comrade Top, in his quest to save Eula's twice-gone chastity. As Gavin and the other boys plant tacks in the road and rig up the rake tooth with the string, he is acting more like someone going through adolescent angst than a grown man with a degree from Harvard. He continues in the same way when he starts the "Rouncewell Panic" by ordering corsages for all the ladies who will attend the Christmas party. Still, he does not realize his failure even when Manfred's own "corsage"--the returned rake tooth ensconced with two flowers and a used prophylactic--arrives. He goes on to the dance where he starts a fight with Manfred, even when he cannot fight. The encounter again exposes Gavin's childish, would-be chivalry, as recently explained by Cleanth Brooks:

Gavin's picking a fight to defend Eula's chastity is surely quixotic. Eula had established a comfortable relation with de Spain. It is Gavin who is insisting that Eula's honor has been impugned, not the level-headed and matter-of-fact Eula.⁹¹

Even so, the fight does not end the sequence of events. Gavin then, evidently deciding that he cannot save Eula, determines to recoil

⁹¹Cleanth Brooks, "Gavin Stevens and the Chivalric Tradition," University of Mississippi Studies in English, 15(1978), p. 23.

against De Spain by forcing his resignation from the office of mayor. His attempt is again misdirected and hopeless. After Gavin forces all the town to do something about the stolen brass Flem put in the water tower (at least for the moment), De Spain agrees to resign, but there is no victory for Gavin:

"Manfred," Judge Stevens says. "Do you want to resign?"
 "Certainly, sir," De Spain says. "I'll be glad to. But not for the city: for Gavin. I want to do it for Gavin. All he's got to do is say please."

(98)

This situation can be compared to the conclusion of Requiem for a Nun, where Gavin gets what he wants, but does not accomplish his goal. He does not say the required "Please," because he finally realizes the pointlessness of his pursuit. The event has brought about the most humiliating defeat of his life;

"So you don't want him not to be mayor," Judge Stevens says.
 "Then what is it you do want? For him not to be alive? Is that it?"

That was when lawyer said it: "What must I do now, Papa?
 Papa, what can I do now?"

(99)

Gavin's actions, his choices, have reduced him to this state. He has now gone from adolescent frustration to pre-puberty snivelling, and both at the age of twenty-three. "What is it you do want?" Gavin wants the return of the old order where "men are men and women are women," and stability is insured simply because all persons carry out their designated roles. In circumstances which remind readers again of Requiem for a Nun, Gavin's chivalry is as debased as Eula's honor, just as Gowan's chivalry was as degenerate as Temple's chastity.

Gavin's conduct in this scene, and in those leading up to it, is indefensible. He has played the part of the fool; he does so not so

much at the hands of Manfred de Spain, but at his own hands, which makes it worse. Certainly Eula has nothing to do with it.

Gavin experiences a series of moral dilemmas with Eula as well; and while he is never again reduced to pre-puberty snivelling, he fails on every count in his relationship with her. To begin with, he fails as a "protector" in the old sense of the word. What he does not recognize is that Eula needs no protection. At the Christmas dance he attacks Manfred for something as supercilious as the way he and Eula are dancing. Gavin is out of his domain. At least by the end of the fight with Manfred he knows he is not Arthur, nor even Sir Kay.

"You fool." Father [Charles Mallison] said. "Don't you know you can't fight? You don't know how."

"Can you suggest a better way to learn than the one I just tried?"

(76)

The next time he sees Eula he learns that he is another kind of failure: he is not Sir Lancelot either. He would protect the romantic love and idealized honor and womanhood of Eula, but he would not play the role of the courtly lover. When he realizes that Eula is indeed offering herself to him, he is not pleased at the prospects of "having a good time in the old town tonight." Rather, he is horrified that she would debase herself so readily--that she would more or less prostitute herself to save Manfred (or Flem?). "Don't touch me!" (94) is his recoil. Romantically protecting the honor of a lady has become confused with carnality.

Adultery with Eula is not, however, the moral dilemma of this encounter. True, he must decide whether or not to accept her offer; but it really is not a temptation--Gavin's attraction for Eula is

"ideal," not physical. Sally Page has seen that Gavin loves "Eula chaste, and her offer reveals that she is tainted."⁹² When he learns that she merely looks the part of his "ideal woman," the moral question is another one. The issue is not whether or not he will accept Eula's offer, but whether or not he will pursue De Spain's resignation. It is to his credit that he does not; however, when he asks his father, "What must I do now, Papa?" one can hardly conclude that he has profited from the lesson and experience--at least not yet. Later he realizes that Eula had offered herself to him not as a bribe to prevent Flem's exposure as a thief or De Spain's resignation; she had done so simply as a matter of compassion. Evidently, she decided that if something so unimportant to herself was so gravely important to Gavin, then he could have her. In so doing she was neither bribing Gavin nor debasing her own integrity and womanhood--she was merely being compassionate in an attempt to alleviate Gavin's tensions. She has felt sorry for him because she--her presence in town--has made him unhappy. "I don't like unhappy people," Eula says. "They're a nuisance." (93)

Gavin's "Don't touch me!" more or less finishes off his personal relationship with Eula. They do not see each other again in the novel until Linda's graduation from high school is approaching and Gavin visits her to secure her assistance in sending the daughter to school. In this event the moral question is similar to the first one, but reworded: "Would Gavin commit adultery with an adulteress?" becomes

⁹²Sally R. Page, Faulkner's Women (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1972), p. 167.

"Would Gavin marry an unblemished virgin?" Eula thinks that because Gavin had so rigorously tried to defend her imagined honor that he would surely defend Linda's genuine honor. Gavin says to Linda:

"All right. Just tell me this. When you went home first and changed before you met me in the drugstore that afternoon. It was your idea to go home first and change to the other dress. But it was your mother who insisted on the lipstick and the perfume and the silk stockings and the high heels. Isn't that right?"

(230)

Eula again is told no, primarily because of the lesson he learned years earlier from Eula herself; he is not Arthur. He laments the passing of the old order which he would defend, but he has learned from his earlier mistakes.

The temptation is not over yet, though. Eula again visits his office on the night before her suicide. Mrs. Flem Snopes again begs him to marry Linda and is told no a second time, but on this occasion the question is in a different context. Originally, she was asking Gavin to marry Linda in order to save her from the clutches of Flem Snopes. She now pleads the same cause but for a different reason. She wants to save Linda from the besmirched reputation of having an (exposed) adulteress for a mother. She is trying to insure Linda's continued respectability; and in so doing, ironically she here displays the same motivation as Flem. She may also be trying to save herself from suicide, although this is not indicated by anything she says and would be only a secondary motive.

By this time Gavin has learned that morality is not just something one can protect and maintain, as he had done as a moral agent and guide; but he knows that morality is something one must achieve with his

heart and soul, rather than with his actions. This is tremendously more difficult and especially more burdensome. When Eula requests her final visit with him, he thinks:

Why me? Why bother me? Why can't you leave me alone? Why must it be my problem whether I was right and your husband just wants your lover's scalp, or Ratliff is right and your husband doesn't give a damn about you or his honor either and just wants De Spain's bank? . . . Take Manfred de Spain in whatever your new crisis is, since you didn't hesitate to quench with him your other conflagration eighteen years ago. Or do you already know in advance he will be no good this time, since a bank is not female but neuter? (318)

It "must be" Gavin's problem because he has made it so. He appointed himself to fill the role of Eula's protector; and, more appropriately, she enlists him to fill that same role for Linda, who needs that protection from both Flem and scandal. Eula Varner Snopes brought about her own social downfall; she would now work to prevent her daughter's. Her attempt to accomplish this is centered upon Gavin, who refuses to accept the role because he had already learned that he is not man enough to fill it.

This passage, however, shows that he is now shrugging off more than the role of Arthur. "Why bother me?" he asks himself. As Gavin gets more and more into the real world where people anguish and suffer, he realizes how easy his previous experiences had been to enact. "Why bother me?" Gavin is the only person to whom Eula can even possibly turn for help. Her coming to him is an act of desperation. "Why can't you leave me alone?" Gavin then asks. The point is that Gavin has involved himself in the affairs of Eula, Flem, and Manfred. He now wishes he had not; that is, he would escape the consequences of his own actions. This is a position in which he had not previously been.

Gavin does not, however, make any excuses for not meeting Eula. He does recognize and fulfill the course of action he had previously set in motion. He abandons all pretensions to protecting female honor. He does not consent to marry Linda; however, he does make a commitment to Eula:

"Then this way. After you're gone, if or when I become convinced that conditions are going to become such that something will have to be done, and nothing else but marrying me can help her, and she will have me, but have me, take me. Not just give up, surrender."

"Swear it then," she said.

"I promise. I have promised. I promise again."

"No," she said. "Swear."

"I swear," I said.

(332-3)

Gavin takes the vow, and by so doing he further insures continued involvement in the whole mess. Moreover, he puts himself in another moral dilemma. Will he actually keep his promise or not? The vow itself, in an indirect way, sends Eula to her grave; she kills herself thinking that Gavin will marry Linda, thereby protecting her daughter. At this point Gavin does not realize that he is as responsible for her suicide as either Flem or Manfred. Gavin both promises and swears, and Eula, believing Gavin a man of honor who will therefore keep his word of honor, dies conditionally subsequent to her faith in Gavin. Eula dies thinking not so much that her suicide will save Linda, but that Gavin will save her after her suicide.

Similarly Gavin experiences a series of moral dilemmas with Linda. These, however, cannot properly be considered a mere repetition of his experiences with Eula. To Eula, he had been half-lover and half-husband; with Linda he would be half-lover and half-father.

Joseph Blotner has written that "Gavin. . . now projected his feelings for the mother onto the daughter, even though she was not the mythic figure her mother was. His feeling for her seemed to be half romantic and half parental. . . ."93

The first encounter with Linda is virtually a repeat of his first experience with Eula. Some dozen years after Manfred and Gavin fight at the Christmas dance, Gavin becomes aware of Linda's honor, which he would act to preserve since that of her mother was a lost cause. This time, however, he never makes any direct attack on the man. He really has nothing to do with Matt Levitt, Linda's boy friend; when he talks about "forming her mind," what he really means is "forming her mind as a way to isolate her from Flem and prevent a repeat of Eula's downfall." Developing her intellect is not so much a ticket out of Jefferson as a ticket away from Snopesism. Gavin had learned from De Spain that he was not a chivalrous knight. He does not further pursue that role; but he has not yet relinquished the idea that the honor of women must be maintained, whether or not it exists.

In Linda, it does exist; but, again, she does not need him to defend or protect it. When Matt bloodies his nose, Gavin gets what he wants. That is, he secures Linda's complete faith in him: "You're all I have, all I can trust. I love you!"(193) Linda says to Gavin. In The Mansion we will be able to evaluate the extent to which Gavin was worthy of this trust; in the present work, he does a fairly good

⁹³Joseph Blotner, Faulkner: A Biography, Vol. II (New York: Random House, 1974), 1612.

job. At least he does not love her but wants only to protect and maintain her ideal womanhood. Also, his motivations for "forming her mind" are decent and sincere, even if they are partially misdirected.

Gavin honors her trust not by marrying her, but by encouraging her to leave Jefferson to further her education; under the circumstances, this is perhaps a wise move since Linda expressly does not want to marry him. (193) Saving Linda from Flem's clutches is a worthy endeavor, as is wanting to prevent her from reenacting Eula's mistakes.

Gavin, however, does make one serious, perhaps irreparable, mistake with her. After Eula's death and burial, Linda comes to Gavin with the question about her parentage. She says to him, "You are the one person in the world I know will never lie to me." Gavin then immediately says, in words which hauntingly replicate his lie to Eula, "All right. . . . I swear to you then. Flem Snopes is your father." (346) His lie is not a harmless, well-intentioned, slight prevarication; it is a harmful, deceitful, anti-truth. It defeats both Linda and Gavin. At this point sheer, unadulterated truth would set Linda free from Flem. Evidently Gavin does not realize this and lies, thinking the lie will preserve Linda's memory of her mother as an honorable woman. He is at once defeated, however, because Linda immediately says that she has known all along about Manfred and her mother. Had Gavin simply acknowledged that Flem was not her father, then all of Flem's power and control over her would be gone. Gavin does not save Linda, but he does become an overt liar.

In all of these cases Gavin experiences very little direct contact with the subjects of his dilemmas. The same is also true with

Flem; again, Gavin actually meets Flem only three or four times during the entire novel, and on all occasions his own behavior is brought into question. It is dubious whether or not Gavin at this point is morally superior to Manfred, Eula, or Linda. He is clearly, however, superior to Flem, who knows no principle except greed for money, and later, the acquisition of respectability through purchase. "Flem is, even more than Popeye, the modern automaton bred by materialism out of original crudeness."⁹⁴

Gavin cannot be bribed with money. When Flem comes to his office after Montgomery Ward Snopes is finally caught with his pornographic "magic lantern," Flem tries to solicit his help in an underhanded way. Flem says, "Let's you and me get together on this. I want him to go to the penitentiary." (167) Gavin declines, evidently not because he is above doing something which is not cricket, but because he does not want to do business with Flem Snopes. Gavin had just demonstrated his capacity for slyness by instructing the sheriff to arrest Montgomery for driving his automobile within city limits in defiance of the antiquated law still on the books.

The next day Flem's plan comes out in the open when Mr. Hampton relates that the key to Montgomery Ward's "studio" had been missing and that federal agents had discovered moonshine there. Mr. Hampton tells all of this to indicate his own complicity. The return of the key to Sheriff Hampton occurs in an odd way. Flem does not simply drop it off at the sheriff's office as one would expect, but he comes to Gavin's

⁹⁴Warren Beck, Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 89.

office to leave it in the personal safekeeping of the County Attorney. Flem is rather sure of himself and is especially concerned that Gavin, too, be involved in ridding the town of Montgomery Ward. Flem realizes that Gavin has only superficially detached himself, and that he will yet be of use to him. He is right of course. Gavin unhesitatingly reaches out for the key as he says, "Much obliged. I'll give it back to the sheriff. You're like me. . . . You don't give a damn about truth either. What you are interested in is justice." (176)

The danger in Gavin's thinking is that he would, and does, define "justice" for himself; it becomes a word whose application to an extent depends upon personal whim and circumstances. Truth, on the other hand, is an objective reality which he avoids. It is more expedient to Gavin's purposes to rid the town of Montgomery Snopes on trumped up moonshine whiskey charges than on legitimate ones of pornography, which may not result in a lengthy prison sentence. Both Gavin and Flem, therefore act ostensibly for the same reason: to maintain the artificial respectability and good reputation of Jefferson. It is all right to uncover and expose illegal whiskey. In this way Flem and Gavin can send Montgomery Ward to Parchman Prison in a respectable way: moonshine whiskey is as wholesome as apple pie. He can be sent to prison and still be a respectable "good ol' boy," while the city of Jefferson does not have to recognize that its citizens have patronized a pornography shop.

This same pattern of opportunism is used again when Flem and Gavin more or less join forces to rid Jefferson of I. O. Snopes. In this later comic episode, Flem again tries to enlist, directly, Gavin's

services as lawyer, Gavin again refuses, announcing that he is already in the employ of the other party. Flem proceeds to have his way anyhow, and secures the absence of I. O. simply by paying him to leave town.

"I said, how much do I owe you?" Mr. Flem said. And Uncle Gavin said he started to say "one dollar," so that Mr. Flem would say "One dollar? Is that all?" . . . But he didn't. He just said:

"Nothing. Mrs. Hait is my client. . . ."

"You can send me your bill."

"For what?" Uncle Gavin said.

"For being the witness," Mr. Snopes said.

(254)

On several occasions Gavin holds the ladder securely in place as Flem climbs up. He has, first of all, not gone through with his plan to drain the water tower which would publicly expose Flem as a thief. Second, he has abetted Flem in ridding the town of Montgomery Ward and I. O. He has also helped bring Mrs. Flem into the mainstream of Jefferson's society by having his sister issue invitations to meetings of the social clubs. At Eula's death, Flem makes his final and most burdensome requirement: he sends the four ministers of Jefferson to Gavin to make arrangements for the funeral. He knows Gavin will do his best to uphold Eula's good reputation and to prevent the outright scandal which he himself was about to unveil (not reveal) to the town. Social propriety and respectability again become the only good, second to his greed for money; and Gavin, this time, is instrumental. She is given proper Christian burial. The monument Gavin orders for her grave becomes a monument to Flem Snopes just as the water tower, with its hidden brass, is his footprint. "A monument only says At least I got this far while a footprint says This is where I was when I moved again," (29) as Faulkner had previously made the distinction. Eula's tombstone,

secured by Gavin yet bought and paid for by Flem, is a monument to many things, perhaps none of which is Eula, and foremost of which is Gavin's and Flem's use of her. Flem has used her in his passage to social acceptance by the local aristocracy; Gavin has used her as his image of unrequited, spiritual, succubus fulfilling for him the role of the ideal woman. To Flem, the "monument to Eula is symbolic of his ultimate success," just as the water tower has symbolized his initial failure in Jefferson.⁹⁵

Earlier I stated that Faulkner's purpose in writing The Town was ostensibly to trace the rise of Flem Snopes in the society of Jefferson. I do not particularly want to subtract from the importance of the author's intention, but surely this in itself does not undercut the omnipresent centrality of Gavin. I have already pointed out that he narrates almost one half of the book. In addition to this, he is important to every nuance of the plot; virtually nothing happens in The Town except with his participation and observation, although the criticism has generally failed to recognize that participation and observation. Gavin, though, participates in all the major action; he is entangled in the Manfred-Eula adulteries, Eula's suicide, and ridding the town of Snopeses. It is true that he observes, but that simply is not all that he does; it is in no way an accurate description of his role. Gavin also has important relationships with all the other characters. In addition to Manfred, Eula, and Flem, he is active with the other narrators, members of his family, and minor characters. He

⁹⁵James Watson Gray, The Snopes Dilemma (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1968), p. 144.

is also a focal point of the theme, as Dorothy Tuck has explained:

The moral point of The Town is clear enough: rapacious and inhuman Flem Snopes is able, with very little trouble, to make his way to the top of Jefferson's social and economic ladder because Jefferson, under its veneer of traditional morality and respectability, has already accepted the values--or lack of values--associated with Snopesism.⁹⁶

Gavin himself is unaware of the lardaceous immorality. He thinks all is fine so long as a "let's pretend" order is maintained. After Eula exposes herself to him for what she is, that is, a woman who does not hold chaste womanhood in any great veneration, he does not respond in any way except to maintain the hypocrisy of society at large. Gavin, as we have already seen, is among other things an embodiment of "traditional morality and respectability." In this way he is what Flem wants to become. Flem, a smart man, must realize that he cannot become this (by birth and origin he is not the real thing), so he maneuvers and manipulates to achieve and acquire all the social symbols of the condition. Flem's money cannot buy respectability, but it does expose the "lack of values" which is already rampant.

Before The Town Gavin's personal morality had not previously been brought into question in any central way. Now it is, since Flem's immorality, what Tuck called his rapaciousness and inhumanity, is already established and unchangeable, though not predictable by anyone. That is, Flem's character never alters, although his bank accounts become larger; his victims are put away one by one; and his influence, power, and acceptance in society grow. On the other hand in the series

⁹⁶Dorothy Tuck, Crowell's Handbook of Faulkner (New York: Thomas J. Crowell Co., 1964), p. 84.

of moral dilemmas which Gavin experiences in The Town, he makes some good choices and some bad ones; his behavior is sometimes reprehensible, while at other times it is admirable; his motivations are often false and selfish, yet at other times they are worthy and sincere.

The overall pattern of Gavin's development occurs in two ways. First, there is a general decline in his righteousness. At the beginning of the novel he is a twenty-three-year-old adolescent maliciously filing a rake tooth for De Spain's tires. Harmless enough, perhaps, and surely Manfred deserves it. His efforts to protect Eula are not totally reprehensible, however, as was explained in an early review:

It does not matter, of course, that Eula does not seek Gavin's help at first, and is not particularly interested in him. Nor does it matter that the town misinterprets his love for Linda. What does matter is that Gavin, in the name of humanity, decency, kindness, and human love, is willing to make the effort, doomed to failure as it is.⁹⁷

By the end of the work, this failure becomes partially and indirectly, yet instrumentally, responsible for Eula's death; this is a far cry from being a "protector." Gavin has been a fool and a liar. He has acted unethically as a lawyer. In short, as Longley suggested, he is human.

But listing all of his faults does not define either his role or character. He does get wiser as time goes on. For example, he does not start a fight with Matt Levitt as he had with Manfred de Spain. Too, while he is an adolescent at the beginning of the work, he outgrows this. From Eula and Linda he also learns a great deal about

⁹⁷John L. Longley, Jr., "Galahad Gavin and a Garland of Snopeses," The Virginia Quarterly Review 33(Autumn, 1957), p. 627.

women. From Ratliff he learns what Snopesism is and why Flem behaves as he does. He also learns the problem of society:

That was it: the very words reputation and good name. Merely to say them, speak them aloud, give their existence vocal recognition, would irrevocably soil and besmirch them, would destroy the immunity of the very things they represented, leaving them not just vulnerable but already doomed; from the inviolable and proud integrity of principles they would become, reduce to, the ephemeral and already doomed and damned fragility of human conditions; innocence and virginity become symbol and postulant of loss and grief, evermore to be mourned, existing only in the past tense was and now is not, no more no more.

(202)

Gavin learns that the opposite of innocence and virginity, guilt and adultery, characterize the present moral state of Jefferson. For this he mourns, as the passage indicates, and also realizes that there will be no restoration.

At the end of the book Gavin, for all he has learned, is still basically self-blinded. He does not yet know what evil he himself is capable of; nor does he recognize his part in Eula's death. He is not consciously aware of his lies and broken promises to Eula and Linda. He is falsely proud of securing the statue and in selecting Eula's epitaph evidently believes he has rendered Linda the great service of protecting her reputation and good name. Indeed, a "virtuous wife is a crown to her husband" and "her children rise and call her blessed." Actually, a good argument could be set forth that Eula is a virtuous woman and that Linda will bless her name and memory, although Gavin at this point would not be the person who could make it. Gavin's motivations in securing the monument and selecting the passage are at least as base and suspect as Flem's in paying for it. Both are trying to maintain social hypocrisy. Flem wants to do so for the sake of his

own reputation; Gavin does so for Linda's. In The Mansion, Gavin becomes aware of his own failures and immorality; but, for the present, these are not directly brought to light. Faulkner is, however, setting everything up.

Perhaps the greatest lesson Gavin learns in The Town has to do with the fall of chivalry and chastity. It is basically the same theme as presented in Requiem for a Nun, except (in the early portions at least) the tone has changed from dark to comic. This is significant because this tenet of the moral code of the Old South was unquestionably the most important one. It defined the roles of men and women in society in such a way as to provide for its own sustenance and maintenance. Chastity of women, more than any other entity, was the fort of order. In a trenchant sense, the social order was only intact if the women were chaste. In Jefferson, Manfred de Spain's mistress is Flem Snopes's wife and Gavin's ideal lover. This can be restated as the mayor's whore is the wife of an unhuman, greedy automaton is the County Attorney's would-be spiritual mistress. It does not particularly matter how we describe the various triangles; everyone involved is severely lacking in acceptable behavior.

The town itself is quite content to go on and live with adultery and fallen womanhood so long as no one brings the matter to public attention. Thus, for example Margaret Stevens Mallison does invite Eula to tea; Flem becomes a deacon in the Baptist church; Manfred is mayor, and the brass stays permanently located in the water tower even after the water assumes a metallic taste. Appropriately, Flem's stolen brass, representing his greed, becomes a part of every-

body's daily existence. To drink the water of life in Jefferson is to consume minute portions of Flem's greed. The rampant hypocrisy, however, manifests itself in less obvious ways. For example, after the Christmas party, Margaret Mallison gives her defeated, bloodied brother a rose which she says is from Eula. Not only does society maintain lies, but the best individuals in town order their personal lives on them, too.

Even after Eula's death, the town continues to protect its hypocrisy. It still will not openly recognize the truth:

Because I know now that we--Jefferson--all knew that he had lost the bank. I mean, whether old Mr. Will Varner ran Mr. Flem Snopes out of Jefferson too after this, Mr. De Spain himself wouldn't stay. In a way, he owed that not just to the memory of his dead love, his dead mistress, he owed that to Jefferson too. Because he had outraged us. He had not only flouted the morality of marriage which decreed that a man and a woman can't sleep together without a certificate from the police, he had outraged the economy of marriage which is the production of children, by making public display of the fact that you can be barren by choice with impunity; he had outraged the institution of marriage twice: not just his own but the Flem Snopes's too. So they already hated him twice: once for doing it, once for not getting caught at it for eighteen years. But that would be nothing to the hatred he would get if, after his guilty partner had paid with her life for her share of the crime, he didn't even lose that key to the back door of the bank to pay for his.

(338-9)

Manfred is forced to leave town not because of his adultery, but because Eula's death, in the eyes of the town, transforms him from lover to lecher. He is no longer a symbol of the gallantry and chivalry of the old order; he is the symbol of their absence. Charles Mallison reports that "Mr. De Spain [who] had resigned from the bank and was moving out West. . . appeared at the grave--alone and nobody to speak to him except to nod--with a crepe armband which was of course all

right since the deceased was the wife of his vice-president. . . ." (339) To the end, the town lives out its hypocrisy with Manfred. It had collectively regarded the Manfred-Eula affair first with tolerance, then with acceptance, then with approval. With Eula's suicide, it then reverts to disapproval, evidently shocked into the realization that the wages of sin is death and that they themselves have permitted a pervasive decline in values.

So the town runs Manfred out and promotes Flem from vice-president to president. He purchases De Spain's antebellum mansion, renovates it, and moves in. Flem is rewarded because, as the town sees it, comparatively speaking, he had not defiled Southern womanhood or worked to expose social evils. Flem has completely debunked Manfred's position, social status, home, and lover. He now represents everything that Manfred previously had; at least he has acquired the symbols, if not become, the man that Manfred was.

Flem is not the only Snopes in town; he is simply the most powerful and influential. Encroaching Snopesism takes many forms: Snopeses prepare food in the town restaurant; they greet visitors at the Jefferson (now Snopes) Hotel; they appropriately become teachers of children in the public schools; they own and manage black smith shops, groceries, banks, and magic lantern studios; they become church officials.

Central to Flem's rise is his attempt to put great distance between himself and all other Snopeses. Flem has acknowledged no family ties as he pursues money and respectability. He makes no offer to help Byron, Mink, Eck, or Montgomery Ward in their sordid, sundry efforts. Rather, he opposes them and works to get them out of town. As for the

good Snopeses, Eck and Wallstreet Panic, he is willing to more or less let them stay in town; but he is not in any respect appreciative of their respectability. He would readily foreclose the mortgages on Wallstreet's grocery were the young man to become delinquent in making payments. (At one point Flem is ready to do so, but Wallstreet does come up with the money.)

From Byron, who had preceded him in moving to Jefferson, Flem learns something about the care and handling of money. Byron is a clod without enough sense to steal but little more than enough money to buy his rail ticket to Mexico. Byron is a thief, whereas Flem had been an embezzler. Flem himself had learned from the brass in the water tower that it is not wise to violate the law; he probably comes to regard his early mistake with contempt, and subsequently never violates legalities again. The reason is not that he is above stealing, but because he will not take the chance of getting caught. Getting caught is not respectable; acquiring money by any means is. Flem realizes that there are too many legal ways to steal to bother with a chance of public exposure as a thief.

Encroaching Snopesism takes many forms. Its outright despicability is evident in such ways as Byron's robbing the bank, Mink's committing murder, I. O.'s defrauding the railroad, Montgomery Ward's showing pronographic movies, and Byron's children's eating a Pekinese dog. The Snopes family in Jefferson succeeds in the businesses of town and otherwise they become the town they live in. True, they are never confused with the old aristocracy, but they become integral to the vitality of the town such that it does not matter.

As Snopesism becomes more pervasive, the existing social order does not accordingly decrease as a matter of reciprocity. Quite the contrary, it simply becomes accommodating. As already explained, Gavin's role in The Town has most usually been interpreted as that of "observer." Eileen Gregory has identified his function as one of "expecting" (as "being" defines Eula, and later, "waiting" defines Mink), saying that he bears the "burden of awareness."⁹⁸ Gavin, for all his talk about watching so that things do not get out of hand, is the Grand Accommodator. He welcomes and protects Flem's wife and daughter; he unethically helps Flem rid the town of Montgomery Ward; and at another time he serves as a legal witness for him. Most important of all, he lies to Linda about who her father is.

In Intruder in the Dust Faulkner had exposed the moral decay of Jefferson as evident in the very existence of the lynch mob and the Gowrie fratricide. No one in Jefferson's society had considered the Gowries with respect. When it became a racial matter--when a tenet of the code was under question--the moral corruption of the Gowries manifested itself, then, in the hearts of the citizenry. In a pertinent way, this theme is repeated in The Town and The Mansion, where the Snopeses, primarily through the manipulation of Flem, again work to expose the social corruption which is the order of the day. The Bundrens, Gowries, and Snopeses all belong in--they make up--the same class.

⁹⁸Eileen Gregory, "The Temerity To Revolt: Mink Snopes and The Dispossessed in The Mansion," Mississippi Quarterly 29(1976), pp.413 and 415.

In the Snopes trilogy there is a marriage between the poor white trash and the old established aristocracy. Eula Varner's marriage to Flem Snopes is about the same as a marriage by Temple Drake (both women have rich judges for fathers) to Vinson Gowrie would have been. The Eula-Flem wedding unites the old order with the new one, the lower class to the upper, and the immoralities of both classes. Eula Varner is not Caddy Compson or Temple Drake; she is more closely akin to Lena Grove, a pregnant before-her-time, loving, earth-mother. All the women, however, are alike in that their chastity has been more than tarnished. "There Was a Queen," Faulkner called one of his stories: in it Southern womanhood died out with Jenny Du Pre.

In Intruder in the Dust Faulkner yet defended the existing social order in one way or another. At least he creates circumstances to maintain Chick's belief in his fellow men. In Requiem he depicted the corruption on both individual and collective (historical) levels. In this respect The Town is more closely akin to Requiem, for the defenses of the existing society are hypocritically sustained. The only defense against Snopesism in Jefferson is Flem himself, the only person who has enough power and will to send the others packing. As Gavin helps Flem in the numerous ways and occasions he does, the continual compromising has its effects on Gavin himself, as is more pronouncedly shown in The Mansion. Flem directly rids the town of Montgomery Ward, I. O., and Byron's four children; he also works to keep Mink and Montgomery Ward in jail. In each case, though, the town (and Gavin) can hardly be viewed as better off because the circumstances of these various exits from the town have been at an expense to their own integrity. Society

itself simply lives with the trumped up moonshine whiskey and I. O.'s dead mule just as it had lived with Eula and Manfred's adulteries. Myra Jehlen has seen another kind of progression in encroaching Snopesism. She points out that in The Hamlet the Snopeses had been rather harmless, if not comic, rustics. By the end of The Town, she sees in Byron's children the total dehumanization of the redneck characters.⁹⁹

For all this talk about moral corruption in Jefferson, Faulkner is not reaffirming the all-encompassing negativity of Requiem for a Nun. There is hope in the T/town. There is actually more than hope; for The Town contains a moral triumph which goes unrecognized by most readers, which is to be expected since even Ratliff, and especially Gavin, is unaware of it. Chick Mallison, viewing things with the innocence, yet perception of young manhood, eventually recognizes goodness:

And I would have to be a lot old than twelve before I realized that that wreath was not the myrtle of grief, it was the laurel of victory; that in that dangling chunk of black tulle and artificial flowers and purple ribbons was the eternal and deathless public triumph of virtue itself proved once more supreme and invincible.

(337)

I do not want to speak too highly about the merits of suicide, but Eula's death is a self-sacrifice designed to save her daughter. She is not trying selfishly to avoid scandal and public ridicule; she probably could care less about what the society of Jefferson thinks of her. Nor is she seeking revenge on Flem and Manfred for bringing her to the choice she must make between eloping with Manfred or staying in town to suffer. She simply wants to save Linda from the consequences of her own mistakes. This course of action seems to be the only pos-

⁹⁹Myra Jehlen, Class and Character in Faulkner's South (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 150.

sible way of doing so. Besides, as Ratliff says, "She was bored," which David Minter has interpreted to mean that she dies partially "because her meager, rapacious world contained no person worthy of her life and love."¹⁰⁰

Moreover, there is no one to whom she can turn for help, since her father, Manfred, and Gavin have all in turn been bested by Flem. Eula is an adulteress and a suicide, but she is by far morally superior to anyone else in Jefferson (except Chick, who is not yet old enough to sin in good conscious conscience). Eula's suicide is an act of love for Linda, not one of despair for the coming scandal of public exposure. Chick goes on to comment sincerely about human nature: he says, "I know now that people really are kind, they really are; there are lots of times when they stop hurting one another not just when they want to keep on hurting but even when they have to." (340) It can be said of Eula that she never hurts anyone in her entire life--this cannot be said of any of the other main characters. Chick's statement also stands in direct contrast to the perception of humanity which Gavin will express in The Mansion, the last book of the Snopes trilogy.

¹⁰⁰David Minter, William Faulkner: His Life and Work (New York: John Hopkins Press, 1980), p. 150.

CHAPTER VI

THE MANSION

"I'm responsible for this [murder] , even if I probably couldn't have stopped it."

--The Mansion, p. 381

In the last chapter I rather severely attacked Gavin's behavior on several counts. He deserved these caustic remarks, as was demonstrated. In The Mansion, his behavior is finally put into perspective--not by me but by him. That is, he undergoes a process of self-realization; his self-blindness is removed, and he sees his behavior for what it is. The exact point of this occurrence is quoted above; Gavin realizes that he, too, is responsible for murder (at one point he calls himself an "accessory"; in another place he views himself as more than an accomplice).

The all-encompassing motif of The Mansion is expressed by nearly every character in it: "Mankind, the poor sons of bitches"--the sentiment is uttered by Madame Reba in the Memphis whorehouse; Rev. Goodyhay in his sermon to Mink after his release from Parchman Penitentiary; by Mink himself, both before and after his release from prison; Gavin, after his murder of Flem; and Ratliff, in agreement with Gavin. Even young Chick, clearly repeating Temple Drake, comes to say, "Man stinks."¹⁰¹ I should mention that the main theme of The Mansion is

¹⁰¹William Faulkner, The Mansion (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 101. Subsequent references from the text are credited parenthetically with the page number.

conventionally seen simply as "the town" ridding itself of Flem Snopes, as recently expressed by Lyall Powers: "The novel is concerned basically with. . . the death of Flem--an event which is the result of the forces of vengeance and retribution. . . . Our feeling at the end of The Mansion is inescapably, that justice has been done."¹⁰² I take issue with this generally accepted view: the death of Flem is a culmination of a plot which contains no evidence of "justice" at all. This is not to say that Flem does not deserve to die, but more important things are going on in the work than his death.

These two expressions by Gavin ("I'm responsible for this," and "Mankind, the poor sons of bitches"--as he echoes Madame Reba) together bring about a moral transformation, as well as a realization, about humanity and himself, which is the theme of The Mansion. He comes to see that he is as bad as any of the criminals and other moral reprobates with whom he has been involved. As a matter of fact, the worst criminal he probably deals with is Mink Snopes, and at the very end there is at least one important way in which Mink is morally superior to Gavin. Mink will not accept the escape money from Gavin after he murders Flem until and unless he is convinced that no strings are attached. He will not make any promises in order to receive the pay-off. Gavin, on the other hand, is prepared to lie to Mink, as he does, in order to get him to accept the money on Linda Snopes's behalf.

¹⁰²Lyall H. Powers, Faulkner's Yoknapatawphian Comedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), p. 233.

Snopesism itself also undergoes a peculiar transformation in The Mansion: it becomes, relatively speaking, more moral. Previously, throughout The Hamlet, The Town, and various stories in which Snopeses appear, this is not the case, except for Eck and Wallstreet Panic Snopes, who, after all, are not really Snopeses since Eck's mother, as Faulkner phrases it, had performed some extracurricular nightwork nine months before his birth. Wallstreet Panic, son of Eck, is another good Snopes who really is not a Snopes. In The Mansion, though, Faulkner has provided evidence of morality for nearly every Snopes who is mentioned. Walter Brylowski, expressing the same basic interpretation as Lyall Powers, sees the novel as an "account of the downfall of the Snopeses, ending with the death of Flem." But he also recognizes a "constant diminishment of Snopesism as consummate evil."¹⁰³

This is especially true for Mink, who not only will not lie, but is moral in other ways. In his original dealings with Jack Houston in The Hamlet, he refuses to let Will Varner pay his debt for his cow's wintering on Houston's property, but insists on paying that debt by working out the full allotment of days. Interestingly enough, he accepts this first ruling of Varner's court literally, since it is the legal requirement placed upon him. So he does not murder Houston because of the wintering of the cow, but because Houston later invokes the previously unmentioned dollar pound fee, a kind of surcharge for the legal proceedings to which Houston was legally entitled. To Mink, Houston deserves death because of the principles involved in his

¹⁰³Walter Brylowski, Faulkner's Olympian Laugh (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1968), p. 206.

claiming that additional one dollar, for which Mink does actually kill him. Joseph Gold explains Mink's morality this way:

Mink feels that he is caught up helplessly in a series of mistakes over which he has no control; instead of control, though, he has resistance and pride, a code of meeting outside demands while not sacrificing his self-respect, and it is this code that finally leads him to shoot Jack Houston.¹⁰⁴

Mink also lives up to a standard of honor when, after leaving Parchman, he returns the \$250 bribe to the warden. To him, returning the money voids his agreement to leave Mississippi and never return, as I shall explain later. Similarly, his second murder occurs as a matter of moral vengeance. Mink believes that Flem has violated some sort of kinship code by not rescuing him from jail after his murder of Houston. The result is that he comes back thirty-eight years later and murders Flem. The most succinct explanation of Mink's character and behavior has been given by Thomas McHaney:

Mink is a bushwhacker, a murderer, though he does not act destructively until he is unbearably provoked. He seeks equity when justice, its mouth full of words, denies him and then keeps him immured. . . . He is small, unprepossessing, and has struggled his whole life with the implacable earth.¹⁰⁵

To this must be added David Minter's comment that "through him Faulkner expressed. . . the sympathy he had always felt for almost defeated humanity."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴Joseph Gold, William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism From Metaphor to Discourse (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 166.

¹⁰⁵Thomas L. McHaney, "Faulkner's Curious Tools," in Fifty Years of Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1979, ed. by Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Albadie (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1980), p. 189.

¹⁰⁶David Minter, William Faulkner: His Life and Work (John Hopkins Press, 1980), p. 244.

Flem himself also displays some signs of morality. When Flem solicits Montgomery Ward Snopes's assistance in preserving his own life for another twenty years by having Monty trick Mink into trying to escape from prison, Montgomery suggests that Flem simply pay out a couple of thousand dollars to a Chicago hit man to have him murder Mink. Flem refuses, and Montgomery recognizes, "Well, well, . . . so there's something that even a Snopes won't do." (67) Interestingly enough, Flem will not become either an "accessory" or an "accomplice" to murder in order to save his own life. Gavin, on the other hand and by his own admission, becomes both of these in order to fulfill Linda Snopes's wishes.

Even Clarence and Montgomery Ward Snopes adhere to some kind of standards, as is evident during their trip to Memphis before Montgomery is imprisoned:

"You go ahead. I'm going to make a quiet family call on an old friend and then coming back to bed. Let me have twenty-five-- make it thirty of the money."

"Flem gave me a hundred."

"Thirty will do," I said.

"Be damend if that's so," he said. "You'll take half of it. I don't aim to take you back to Jefferson and have you tell Flem a god-damn lie about me. Here."

I took the money. "See you at the station tomorrow at train time."

"What?" he said.

"I'm going home tomorrow. You don't have to."

"I promised Flem I'd stay with you and bring you back."

"Break it," I said. "Haven't you got fifty dollars of his money?"

"That's it," he said. "Damn a son of a bitch that'll break his word after he's been paid for it."

(74)

Something must be said about the Snopeses's sense of morality. Previously it seemed non-existent. In The Mansion, it is central to much of the action and behavior of the main Snopes characters. I do not want to

draw too much attention to this, but some sort of moral code does govern their behavior, at least among themselves. What Faulkner was doing in these various episodes is to establish this morality within the clan. Later these interrelationships validate Mink's motive in murdering Flem after thirty-eight years: Flem dies because he had violated the morality of the Snopes's family bond. Sally Page thereby equates the murder of Flem with Mink's "affirming his own values as a human being."¹⁰⁷

In The Mansion, this development is perhaps the only unexpected, important one in the book. Numerous other motifs, ideas, and even exact episodes are more or less directly repeated from The Hamlet and The Town. Encroaching Snopesism continues to encroach; Flem moves from an ordinary house to the De Spain antebellum mansion; Gavin continues to be infatuated with Linda as he had previously been attracted to Eula; Chick remains a young side-kick, occasional narrator; Ratliff is yet "right" all the time.

Gavin's characterization and actions are precisely consistent with those of other appearances; at least this consistency is evident until his moment of moral realization. Early on in the book Ratliff describes Gavin as "Lawyer Stevens, so dedicated to civic improvement and the moral advancement of folks that his purest notion of duty was browbeating twelve-year-old boys into running five-mile foot races when all they really wanted to do was just to stay at home and set fire to

¹⁰⁷Sally R. Page, "Faulkner's Sense of the Saved," in Faulkner: Fifty Years After The Marble Faun, ed. by George H. Wolfe (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1976), p. 112.

the barn." (53) Ratliff also describes him as, "a meal-mouthed sanctimonious Harvard-and Europe-educated lawyer that never even needed the excuse of his office and salaried job to meddle in anything providing it wasn't none of his business and wasn't doing him no harm." (55) We must remember that these descriptions are being made by Gavin's best friend, a man who will later help him give Mink the escape, pay-off money. At any rate, Gavin's civic interest and concern for what Ratliff calls "moral advancement," as well as his meddlesome nature, are intact from earlier works.

Similarly, some of the episodes (at least, Gavin's moral role in them) are mildly disguised repetitions from earlier works. For example, Linda Snopes offers herself to Gavin in almost exactly the same fashion as her mother--the main difference being that she used the actual vernacular for "intercourse" in her spoken offer. This time, Gavin is not shocked by the offer but by Linda's use of the word.

Gavin also retains his ability to make mistakes at social engagements through inappropriate appearances. In "Go Down, Moses" he had been completely out of place by going to the wake for Butch Beauchamp. In The Mansion he does something vastly more erroneous when he maneuvers to have Hoak McCarron (Linda's natural father) show up as a guest at his daughter's wedding.

The familiar good-bye scene at the train station (previously recorded in Light in August and "Go Down, Moses") is reenacted when Linda departs for the north. That is, saying good-bye at the train station gives Gavin an opportunity to lapse into one of his long-winded speeches in which he explains somebody's character.

Also, many of Gavin's beliefs about social evil and racism find their way into many of his comments about Linda's role as a card-carrying communist. For example, "What do you want with justice when you've already got welfare?" (207) In particular, when Linda would accomplish social reform by becoming a school teacher of black children, Gavin has a ready vehicle for inserting much commentary about social problems, especially racism, into the story. These are repeated almost directly from the long-winded speeches of Intruder in the Dust.

Gavin's first role as detective is also replicated. In "Knight's Gambit" when young Harriss had run off to Memphis after setting his murder plan into action, Gavin had simply telephoned Memphis and had a lawyer-friend "with connections" watch him for a few days. In The Mansion when he realizes (rather, when Flem informs him) that Mink has gone to Memphis to acquire a gun with his only ten dollars, he telephones the same lawyer-friend who is able to locate the place of purchase and call Jefferson with the information. In the episode involving Orestes Snopes, Gavin succeeds at long last in successfully eliminating a Snopes from Jefferson. Orestes attempts to murder Meadowfill, a sulky old man who lives on the outskirts of town, with a booby trap set up in such a way as to make it appear that McKinley, his neighbor, were the murderer. Gavin intervenes and uses the booby trap to force Orestes to leave town. The prevention of the murder exactly fits Gavin's role in the various murder stories of Knight's Gambit.

I list all of these items to show Gavin's complexity in The Mansion. He remains the sum of his experiences, acting and living the same way as he always had. In so doing, he fills all the previously

identified requirements of moral agent (in preventing the murder of Meadowfill), moral guide (to Chick and Linda), and moral person (to himself). But his character is not fully defined until the point at which he says, "I'm responsible for this."

The immediate, literal interpretation of his statement is that he is referring to the help given Linda in securing Mink's early release from prison. Even here, he has "rationalized" to himself by arguing that, should he refuse, Linda would simply have hired another lawyer who could make the necessary legal petition to the governor. So he decides that it is better to remain "involved" so he can try to alter and control the circumstances and conditions of Mink's release. He lies to himself which, I must add, is a totally new aspect of his character not previously in operation. On numerous occasions he has told lies, but he now whets his appetite for deliberate self-deceit. To the point, he convinces himself that Mink can really be bought off (bribed would be the more appropriate word) from murdering Flem. Thus he proceeds by giving the warden \$250 in cash and instructing him to release Mink only under condition that he promise to leave Mississippi and never return. Gavin knows better but goes ahead with his feeble, foolish effort.

Toward the end of the novel, Gavin shows himself a master of self-deceit by refusing to believe that Linda had cold-heartedly, calculatingly paved the way for Flem's murder by Mink over a period of time. He lies to himself repeatedly as the evidence continues to bear this out: everything from Ratliff's questions to Mink's assertions, and even, indeed, after Linda's personal acknowledgment to Gavin.

When he says, "I'm responsible for this," he refers to much more than his acting as Linda's legal agent in petitioning the governor for Mink's early release. The second part of his statement, "even if I probably couldn't have stopped it at this point," indicates that he is speaking not so much of legal as moral responsibilities. The result is that he finds himself morally wanton--he comes to perceive himself as just another one of the "poor sons of bitches." I will comment more on this later, but for the moment realize that this statement, and Gavin's application of it to his own condition, is (given the context) a legitimate one; it is not, however, the final thing to say about his character and morals. Moreover, as Michael Millgate has astutely pointed out, it is very possible that Gavin's responsibility for Flem's murder may be little more than Gavin's being manipulated, once again, by Flem:

. . . by a final irony, Flem seems actually to welcome the death which Mink brings him: he does nothing to prevent Mink's early release, takes no steps to protect himself, and makes no effort to prevent Mink from taking a second shot when the first misfires. Mink and Linda, it would appear, may actually have done Flem a favour by killing him, and Gavin Stevens may once again have trapped himself into playing Flem's game.¹⁰⁸

Even if he has played Flem's game, however, he is still responsible for his own actions.

His recognition of culpability encompasses the entire history of his conduct with Eula, Linda, Flem, and Manfred. His statement, specifically, refers to his failure to tell Linda who her father is; it is a

¹⁰⁸Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 248.

direct outgrowth of that lie and broken promise. After Eula's death, had he told her that Flem was not her father, she would have been freed from him rather than enslaved to him. She eventually realizes that Gavin had lied, but the conditions of that knowledge do not free her. Moreover, it was Gavin who sent her off to New York where she became a soldier and fought in the Spanish Civil War. Indirectly it was Gavin who worked to qualify her as a murderess. Gavin meddles in other people's lives, altering the course which they would have taken; and yet he will not carry out various courses of action to their deserved end. He should have taken up Eula's offer, and later Linda's, after making such a spectacle of all the people involved; yet he does not. He should have, at least, married Linda and fulfilled the sequence of events he had set into motion; he should have gone ahead and insisted upon Manfred's resignation as mayor, given that he had worked so hard to bring it about; finally, he should have directly abetted Flem in ridding the town of Snopeses, given his continuous dialectics about them. All of these "shoulds" are conditional of course; what I am saying is that Gavin has repeatedly "set things up" and then practiced cowardly abandonment at the last moment.

Not so with Flem's murder; he acknowledges at last and to himself at least, what he has worked. So his first course of action is to set things right, which is what it should be. He goes straight to Flem and informs him of all that has happened, thinking that Flem can therefore take all the necessary precautions to prevent his own murder. This, I think, is commendable; he meets the terms of his culpability and tries to pay them off. Flem, however, does not react in the expected way--he

does not move once again to eliminate Mink and save his life for another twenty years. Evidently he has, as Ratliff later suggests, succumbed to Eula's boredom. So the power magnate sits awaiting Mink's bullet under what can only be called suicidal conditions.

When Gavin realizes that Flem will not save himself he then tries something else; he informs Sheriff Hampton and also calls his lawyer-friend in Memphis who agrees to monitor the sale of guns to provide warning of Mink's advance. It does not work, of course, since "Old Moster," not Gavin, is in charge of Flem's death. He does try, however, and makes an honest and sincere effort, this time, to undo the sequence of events he has set into motion. In Intruder in the Dust he had worked to undo his mistake about Lucas's guilt; as soon as he realized Lucas was innocent, he helped identify the actual murderer and legally establish Lucas's innocence. In The Mansion, things are not quite so simple; he is not successful at "taking it back," or "undoing time." As I said, Old Moster is in control here.

Gavin, does, however, meet the terms of responsibility for his mistakes. Now, he gives Mink the money. This action stands in contrast to his inability to accept Manfred's resignation, make love to Eula or Linda, marry Linda, and help Flem run Snopeses out of town. He finally realizes that accepting responsibility for one's actions is part of morality, too. So he carries out his role as primary instrument of Linda's murder of Flem. He takes Mink the pay-off money, again, evidently fulfilling a sense of moral responsibility; Linda recognizes her debt to Mink for carrying out the murder; true, there has never been any agreement of even communication between them; but Linda had secured his

freedom so that he could carry out her designed purpose (which, coincidentally happens to be his). At least one critic, James Gray Watson, has seen this murder as an act of morality:

Given scope by Linda's transcendent humanistic love and depth by Mink's intensely personal determination to assert his individual human identity, their murder of Flem is a strictly moral act, symbolizing the simultaneous accumulation of the multitude of separate responses to amorality throughout the trilogy.¹⁰⁹

This explains why she could not simply sit peacefully for two more years when Mink would be released from prison. Linda wants to be Flem's murderer even if she does not want to pull the trigger herself. Moreover, she wants Gavin to be explicitly involved. In a way, Linda finally makes a man out of Gavin. He is finally forced to go through with something despite the fact he realizes that it is the wrong course of action. (Conversely, Mink's problem is of the opposite nature: he goes through with something because it is the wrong course of action.)

Actually, he chooses to do so. He takes the escape money to Mink acting freely out of his own will, even though it is certainly not a pleasant task. Gavin could easily have refused; after all, neither Linda nor Gavin has committed an illegal act of any description until that money changes hands. That is, Gavin as County Attorney has conducted himself, legally and ethically, in an unquestionably acceptable fashion, until he gives Mink the money. Gavin acts to undo what he had come to see as his cowardly nature:

¹⁰⁹James Gray Watson, The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1968), pp. 228-9.

He crossed the Square rapidly, thinking Yes, I really am a coward, after all when that quantity, entity with which he had spent a great deal of his life talking or rather having to listen to (his skeleton perhaps, which would outlast the rest of him by a few months or years--and without doubt would spend that time moralising at him while he would be helpless to answer back) answered immediately Did anyone ever say you were not? Then he But I am not a coward: I am a humanitarian. Then the other You are not even original; that word is customarily used as a euphemism for it.

(378-9)

In other words, giving Mink the pay-off buys for him the dignity of not being a coward. Toward the end, notice that it is not a lump sum pay-off. Gavin instructs Mink to keep him informed of his address and that he will receive \$250 every three months. (379) One would think that Gavin would give him one large payment rather than an indefinite, continued number of smaller ones. The periodic payments, however, insure not Mink's continued existence, but Gavin's continued meeting the terms of his manhood and the liability thereof. I do not want to overemphasize or misinterpret the matter: for Gavin to give Mink Snopes money is a moral villainy of the first order; however, it also accomplishes two or three good things: freedom from his self-acknowledged cowardice; fulfillment, finally, of a sequence of events he had set in motion; and, an achievement of manhood at fifty-six years of age.

Faulkner's masterful effort has been to get us to be sympathetic with Gavin's money-giving. He is not simply indicting his behavior--he does not even do that for Mink, Flem, or Montgomery Ward in The Mansion. All of us are sinful by nature; The Mansion embraces Southern Calvinism, which sees all flesh as evil. In earlier works (Mink in The Hamlet and The Town; Gavin throughout), Mink had been maliciously evil and Gavin had been passively evil. In The Mansion Faulkner works toward

some role swapping. Mink is described as passively enacting the will of Old Moster; Gavin, on the other hand, becomes aware of his own malicious nature.

Gavin's role in The Mansion is different in other ways from his role in The Town. In the earlier work, for the first time, he goes through a series of moral dilemmas and makes many moral choices, some good and some bad. In The Mansion Gavin's moral decisions are not so numerous but they are assuredly more ponderous and intense. In these last two works Gavin is what I have called a "moral person." By this I have never meant that he is a saint, or anything that resembles one. He does not always make the "right" choices; frequently he does not. When I say that he is a moral character I mean that he is conscious of right and wrong, good and evil, in his own heart and that he tries, given his limitations, to do the right thing. In these two works he is concerned about his own behavior; he flounders as a moral guide for Linda, although we have proof enough that he has been a success with Chick. He is yet a moral agent, fulfilling the role of lawyer-detective acting to prevent crime, when he calls his friend in Memphis and asks him to watch out for Mink Snopes. Although on this count he is an ineffectual failure, later, acting as a sleuth, he has no trouble in locating Mink after the murder of Flem. No aspect of this man is ever left behind. Faulkner has consistently characterized him with great care.

Just as carefully, however, he has continued to explore this man's moral development in time. Gavin keeps learning as he matures. His moral perception is much keener at the end of The Mansion, just as

his behavior is more questionable. Such an awareness of his own condition is achieved by Gavin, just as surely as it was never achieved by Temple Drake.

At the end of the novel (and his career as we know it) Gavin makes several comments about morality in general. The most important of these is, "There aren't any morals. . . . People just do the best they can." (429) The two statements obviously contradict one another; for to say that there is a "best" way to act is to imply that there is a "worst." And once we have "best" and "worst" we have good and evil--hence standards--hence morals. When Gavin says that there are no morals he is applying this idea to his immediate situation in helping Mink Snopes, murderer. He is trying to "rationalize" what he has done--with the attitude (almost) that it does not matter anyway. It is another example of his ability to lie to himself. This statement has consistently been literally interpreted as evidence for an absence of moral law in Faulkner's literature. For example, Luther Stearns Mansfield recently wrote that in "Yoknapatawpha, there is no moral law; no brooding or meditation will aid man's understanding of God's purpose. In this world the operation of moral cause and effect is chance only."¹⁰⁰

The lines have also been interpreted as proof of Gavin's, and even Faulkner's, despair. But I cannot see that at all. The sentiment,

¹¹⁰Luther Stearns Mansfield, "The Nature of Faulkner's Christianity," Descant 22(1978), p. 41.

more exactly, is "Would that there were no morals." In an earlier passage Gavin recognizes that "just to hate evil is not enough. You--somebody--has got to do something about it." (307) This doing "something about it" and "people just doing the best they can" is the same thing. Gavin tries, and when he fails, as in the case of preventing Flem's murder, he naturally expresses the effects of that failure. Edmund Volpe has also found affirmation in Gavin's final statements that there are no morals and that we are all "poor sons of bitches":

Gavin's pronouncement includes himself, includes all men. . . It is possible to brand Linda a murderess and forget her great capacity for fidelity; to condemn Gavin for abetting a murder and to ignore his idealism, his sense of justice, his decency and honesty; to condemn Ratliff for abetting a murder and to forget his sixty years of honesty and integrity and compassion. Faulkner, it would seem, is not denying that certain acts are wrong; he is simply recognizing the complexity of the human heart and embracing all men--the "poor sons of bitches"--with sympathy.¹¹¹

Thus Stevens's role as a moral person does not end on a beatific note. He is now involved with people who anguish and suffer--indeed, he has become one of them.' As a moralist and idealist he presently recognizes his earlier failures. As a moral person, however, he does not; his "I'm responsible for this" at least neutralizes, if not cancels, his "There are no morals."

Faulkner was once asked if he thought any of his characters succeeded in being affirmative. Surprisingly, he did not mention Dilsey, Lena Grove, or Jenny Du Pre, but answered: "Yes I do. There was Gavin Stevens. He was a good man but he didn't succeed in living

¹¹¹Edmund L. Volpe, A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1964), p. 340.

up to his ideal."¹¹² This is exactly Gavin's problem: he always tries to live up to the ideal, when that "Ideal" (the moral code of the Old South) is, as we have seen over and over and over again, defunct. Yet Gavin, a good man at heart, never sways from his allegiance to it even as he becomes baptized in the cess pool of its corruption. Throughout the trilogy, as explained by Peter Swiggart, "the complex facts of Southern history and culture are reduced to the scale of a simplified yet grandiose social mythology: the degeneration of the white aristocracy, the rise of Snopesism, and the white Southerner's gradual recognition of his latent sense of racial guilt."¹¹³ Usually, in his earlier appearances Gavin has singularly lived through only one tenet of the code as failure (for example, racism in Intruder in the Dust or the passing of chastity of women in Requiem for a Nun). In The Mansion, specifically, all the tenets of the code (see pages 9 and 10 of Chapter I) are brought under fire.

The special role of women, which required protection of their chastity, is hardly at work when Linda Snopes returns from the war and informs Gavin that he may take her by using the "explicit vernacular." Linda falls into line after Eula Varner, Temple Drake, and Caddy Compson, as women without chastity, unable and unwilling to accept their roles.

¹¹²James B. Meriwether, Lion in the Garden (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 225.

¹¹³Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 203.

The racial problems brought by the code also come into focus when the principal of the black school comes to ask Gavin to put a stop to Linda's attempts to reform black children through education. The principal says to Gavin, "Say [to Linda] we thank her and we won't forget this. But to leave us alone. Let us have your friendship all the time, and your help when we need it. But keep your patronage until we ask for it." (225) The social lines between black and white remain as much as ever. The principal's speech is little more than a paraphrasing of the main points of Gavin's speeches in Intruder in the Dust. The point is that once again Gavin himself must confront the social injustice of racism. As Linda proceeds with her efforts to save black youth from ignorance and poverty (in a manner which reminds us of Joanna Burden in Light in August) the words "nigger lover" appear scribbled on her sidewalk. Gavin takes these words personally because of his love for her.

The passing of the Old South as an agrarian culture is another realization made by Gavin. Ironically, the old, established aristocracy of such folks as Will Varner gives way to the capitalistic, mechanical qualities of Flem Snopes. Faulkner uses the Snopeses as representatives of the worst of the old order who become the most powerful figures of the new one. At one point, before Mink murders Jack Houston, Faulkner lets us know what Mink is thinking as he works Houston's land:

. . . was it any wonder that a man would look at that inimical irreconcilable square of dirt to which he was bound and chained for the rest of his life, and say to it: You got me, you'll wear me out because you are stronger than me since I'm jest bone and flesh. I can't leave you because I can't afford to, and you know it. Me and what used to be the passion and excitement of my youth until

you wore out the youth and I forgot the passion, will be here next year with the children of our passion for you to wear that much nearer the grave, and you know it.

(90)

The land has been transformed from blessing into curse, and the Snopeses, even the Snopeses, are leaving it, too. Among other things encroaching Snopesism is the change from an agrarian state to an industrialized one. Every time a new Snopes shows up in town, there is one less on the farms of Frenchmen's Bend.

The role of male hierarchy, chivalry, and primogeniture has completely disappeared and exists, if at all, only in memory. Gavin finally married a woman beyond child-bearing age; Chick is interested only in "laying" Linda, but of course never makes any effort to do so; Ratliff remains unmarried and his sexuality is never in any way alluded to. Among the Snopeses, Flem himself is impotent and therefore childless; Montgomery Ward is evidently either homosexual or totally uninterested in sex (78); Clarence and Virgil, who frequently patronize whorehouses, make money off bets about sexual encounters (Clarence, acting rather as a pimp, bets that Virgil can accommodate two prostitutes in succession to their satisfaction), and hardly qualify. (73)

A reverence for the past and its traditions is also fading. The best example of this is the bad end which comes to Clarence Snopes's run for senator. Ratliff eliminates him at Varner's annual picnic and election kick-off by telling the other candidate's nephews to collect switches from a "dog stop" and inconspicuously pass them over Clarence's pants legs. The result is that the dogs urinate on Clarence and he leaves the picnic in disgrace. The loss of dogmatic reverence for

the past also appears in other ways; it is related that young men from the countryside are finally joining the union (that is, enemy) army in the two wars against Germany.

In a way society is falling apart around Gavin Stevens, idealist. But this crumbling social morality is not the only decay; Gavin's personal actions, apart from all of this, also suffers in many respects. Prohibition made hypocrites out of everyone. Gavin, Ratliff, and Flem all purchase and drink illegal whiskey (Flem never drinks, but he does illegally purchase liquor for Linda)--they purchase the same substance which they had planted in Montgomery Ward's studio in order to send him to prison.

Gavin's marriage to Melisandre Harriss is also gravely suspect. He marries her entirely because Linda asks him to. It turns out, fortunately, not to be such a bad match; yet one can hardly condone the fact that he married Melisandre because it would please Linda. Linda evidently made such a request for two reasons: she thought it would make Gavin into a man and she thought it would make him happy. She was not so foolish about this as it may appear; Ratliff later admits that he had thought the same thing.

Gavin's use of money also comes into question. Of course he is never ridden with greed in the same way that Flem is; yet he assumes control of Melisandre's money when they are married. Marrying a rich lady in itself does not pose any problems, but the origins of the money do. Melisandre's first husband had reportedly made his fortune illegally--Gavin thus becomes controller of illegally acquired money. Noel Polk has recently explained the implications of his marriage to "money";

The irony is hardly lost on the reader, though Stevens does not appear to notice, that, having married Melisandre, he reaps the benefits of the fortune left to her by her deceased bootlegger husband, a real gangster, a flesh and blood criminal, compared to whom Flem is small fry indeed, even if Flem is all that Gavin believes him to be. Stevens's failure to see this irony is one measure of his grasp of the situation he helps to create in The Town.¹¹⁴

When they were married Melisandre wanted to present Gavin with a new Cadillac; he agreed to accept it provided that he could do anything with it he wanted. Gavin parked it in a garage, removed its tires and battery to prevent theft; he then procured a loan from Flem Snopes's bank, using the vehicle as collateral, and proceeded to never make any payments on the loan. He took great pride in this matter, childishly believing he had bested Flem Snopes. For the County Attorney to default on a loan under such conditions is hardly a moral triumph. One could condone his inheritance of the Harriss money, but not this overt misuse of it.

Faulkner uses such activities to bring into focus the difference between collective, social morality and individual, personal morality. Gavin suffers in both ways. The two frameworks, however, are brought together with his realization that "I'm responsible for this." Part of Gavin's problem is that he cannot be a success in terms of his individual morality until he escapes the bonds of his collective morality. This never occurs. And, while Gavin remains, almost by definition a "good man," to use Faulkner's phrasing, he is not the ideally good man he would like to be. He is a "good man" comparatively speaking--

¹¹⁴Noel Polk, "Faulkner and Respectability," in Fifty Years of Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1979, ed. by Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Albadie (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1980), p. 125.

not ideally speaking. Gavin, too, is controlled by Old Master, although it is perhaps a different Old Master than Mink's: Gavin's Old Master is the moral code of the Old South.

Just as Flem's greed for money, power, and respectability were the driving force in The Town, Old Master Himself is the driving force of The Mansion. He appears first of all in the opening section of the book "Mink," where he is the controlling factor in Mink's life; in particular, he is the psychological projection of Mink's sense of justice which causes him to murder Jack Houston.

The exact identity of Old Master (that is, what Faulkner means by the term) is illusive. On the literal level it is God, the Creator and master of humanity before the fall of man. But there is another old master; evil has mastered man's fate and destiny for such a time that it (or, he--Satan) also rightfully deserves the title. So the two possibilities are actually united into one driving force which controls, which is, the nature of man. This inescapable duality is evident throughout and occurs in the character of every person in the work. Such an interpretation of Old Master's character is reinforced by the fact that "Old Master," while always written without the plural s, is generally referred to by the plural pronoun--either they or them. This interpretation of Old Master's character is at variance with that made by Irving Howe, who sees Old Master as God and They-Them as "the world," in a permanent condition with "Them forever and even rightly and naturally triumphant, always in control of events as they move along, yet with Old Master standing in reserve, not to intervene or

help but to draw a line."¹¹⁵ In either case, confusion is the order of the day.

Mink starts out disbelieving in Old Moster's existence: "He didn't believe in any Old Moster. He had seen too much in his time for that, if any Old Moster existed, with eyes as sharp and power as strong as was claimed He had, He would have done something about." (5) Faulkner describes Mink's murder of Jack Houston in this way:

He cocked the two hammers and pushed the gun through the porthole, and even as he laid the sight on Houston's chest, leading him just a little, his finger already taking up the slack in the fron trigger, he thought And even now. They still ain't satisfied yet as the first shell clicked dully without exploding, his finger already moving back to the rear trigger, thinking And even yet as this one crushed and roared. . . .

(39)

The "they" is Old Moster, yet not satisfied with Mink's murder of Houston, and so will eventually return to be the driving force of his murder of Flem.

Near the end of the work, Old Moster is still definitely in control as Faulkner takes us into Mink's mind when he overcomes all obstacles in going to Memphis and returning to Jefferson to murder Flem. He thinks (realizes) several times that "Old Moster just punishes; He don't play jokes." (398) This punishment is worked by the dual nature of Old Moster, which finds itself in man's nature: "like Old Moster Himself had put it into a man's very blood and nature his paw had give him at the very moment he squirted him into his maw's belly," (434)--man experiences only "punishment," not because God is

¹¹⁵Irving Howe, William Faulkner (New York: Vintage Press, 1962), pp. 292-3. (See page 6 of The Mansion for Mink's definition of they-them.)

good and the devil is evil, but because man is by nature both of these.

It is simply man's plight, as Ratliff recognizes in another context:

It was his [Gavin's] fate and doom to be born into one of them
McCarron separate covers too instead of into that fragile and what
you might call gossamer-sinewed envelope of boundless and hopeless
aspiration Old Master give him.

(128)

I have spent all of this time discussing the role of Old Moster because it has a great deal to do with Faulkner's final conception of Gavin. As Ratliff recognizes, man--one named Gavin--is subject to fate and doom and Old Moster, which is a driving force in Gavin's life as well as in Mink's. There is a difference, however, since Mink never comes to recognize his own responsibility for his actions. Mink remains simply a subservient agent; Gavin, primarily through his moral awareness, transcends a dependency on Old Moster, albeit this does not negate or undo his actions. Old Moster is the driving force; but Gavin deals with that force and, while he never defeats it, at least achieves an understanding of its existence within himself.

In considering changes in character from The Town and The Mansion, we must see that Gavin is the only character who experiences any real moral change. All of the other main characters always perform as we expect them to; they are static, not developed in any way, and their actions function only as logical, predictable extensions of their roles and characters in The Town. I have already pointed out that Faulkner reveals that even Snopeses have a code of behavior among themselves, but beyond that the novel does not contain characters who experience any moral development, except Gavin. In this way, it is undoubtedly a novel about Gavin Stevens. No reader really cares what

happens to Flem, Mink, Clarence, or Montgomery Ward Snopes; their predicaments, characters, and actions provide us with a kind of entertainment usually based on the pathetic; this is not true for Gavin. With this character we care about his decline to murder, and we feel for him. Often, we must condemn his actions, but always we must admire his pursuits. This alone sets him apart from the others. As for Linda and Ratliff, our concern for them is genuine, but even so, it is primarily an outgrowth of our concern for Gavin. I will stop just short of asserting that the novel is Gavin's novel. As Warren Beck has said, "If Gavin Stevens is seen as a real being, a man of like aspirations, fumbings, and persistence, then his central position in Faulkner's scheme of things will be understood."¹¹⁶

As Gavin pursues the "ideal," whether it be manhood without moral cowardice, chastity in women, or simply goodness among his people, he always walks in the shadow of Old Moster. Throughout The Mansion Gavin makes a number of moral pronouncements; I have already explained the most important of these ("Mankind, the poor sons of bitches"; "There aren't any morals"; and "I'm responsible for this"), but a few others must be discussed in order to more fully perceive Faulkner's treatment of him.

An important one is his statement about the source of ideals and human evils:

The music and the ideas both come out of obscurity, darkness. Not out of shadow: out of obscurity, obfuscation, darkness. Man must

¹¹⁶Warren Beck, Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 121.

have light. He must live in the fierce full constant glare of light, where all shadow will be defined and sharp and unique and personal: the shadow of his own singular rectitude or baseness. All human evils have to come out of obscurity and darkness, where there is nothing to dog man constantly with the shape of his own deformity.

(132-3)

Gavin's explanation here, while it sounds like a twisted variation of "The Allegory of the Cave," is in exact accord with his later understanding about the dual nature of Old Master. It is not that God is darkness and obscurity, but that the duality of good and evil in human nature can only result in confusion, chaos, and darkness, in the same way as Milton and Pope used these words. Because of the darkness man, exemplified in Gavin, pursues the ideal in order to escape his bondage to that darkness. Too, along the way, again, as exemplified by Gavin himself, man makes wrong choices which account for human evil. Gavin later recognizes this "deformity" in himself: "I'm responsible for this."

In another place Ratliff discusses Gavin's pursuit of the ideal, when this pursuit is centered upon Linda:

. . . he [Gavin] wouldn't never be free because he wouldn't never want to be free because this was his life and if he ever lost it he wouldn't have nothing left. I mean, the right and privilege and opportunity to dedicate forever his capacity for responsibility to something that wouldn't have no end to its appetite and that wouldn't never threaten to give him even a bone back in recompense.

(163)

Ratliff correctly understands that Gavin is as much enslaved to the pursuit of the ideal as the ideal itself. He also sees, as pointed out by Lynn Levins, that Gavin is, finally, not defeated by his pursuits of Eula-Linda; Ratliff sees in Gavin's loss of Linda (after Flem's murder when she leaves Jefferson presumably forever) "an ethical vic-

tory of those chivalric principles by which he lives."¹¹⁷ Moreover, he does not really want to be "free" from either. The word responsible is again the important one; Gavin does become this, but even so he yet wants to believe--he lies to himself--that Linda had not murdered Flem even after she confesses as much to him.

Chick mentions that Gavin and Ratliff have frequently stated that "man ain't really evil, he just ain't got any sense." (230) What they mean by this is that man's mistakes, the evil actions which he performs, come out of an ability to see clearly enough in the darkness and obscurity to alter his condition, or even to avoid making the mistakes. In The Town, we are told several times that Mink is the only out-and-out mean Snopes who ever came to Jefferson. Maybe so, but it is hard to reconcile him as evil by definition with Faulkner's description of him at the very end of The Mansion:

. . . himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the brave, right on up to the very top itself among the shining phantoms and dreams which are the mile-stones of the long human recording--Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim.
(435-6)

This rather poetic ending shows that Mink, too, is capable of pursuing the ideal. And while he (and Linda) murdered Flem for vengeance and Gavin murdered him to please Linda, both mistakenly think that the act will achieve the ideal. All are wrong. In the first place we should agree with Edward Holmes that Mink is the "instrument of revenge, not

¹¹⁷Lynn Gartrell Levins, Faulkner's Heroic Design (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 153.

the source of it." In any case we must see that even Mink is not really evil, he "jest ain't got any sense." After he murders Flem he returns to the ruins of the old cabin where he had lived before being sent to Parchman. Here he "stoically waits"--not hides.¹¹⁹ He does not have enough sense to realize that the sheriff will surely look for him at this location, just on the slight chance he will be there.

Chick subsequently quotes another favorite moral sentiment which Gavin and Ratliff have lived by:

. . . white-collar innocents who learned by heart President Roosevelt's speeches, could believe anew each time that honor and justice and decency would prevail just because they were honorable and just and decent, his uncle and Ratliff never had believed this and never would.

(304)

Perhaps in the past, as Chick says, Gavin believed that goodness would triumph in human nature just because it existed. I doubt that Chick is right when he says that they had "never" really believed this; Gavin had given legitimate expression to this belief in Intruder in the Dust, for example. At any rate, if Chick is not right when he makes the statement, it does come to have application long before Gavin hands Mink the pay-off murder money. Chick proceeds to recall, as already quoted, that Gavin had realized that just "to hate evil is not enough. You--somebody--has got to do something about it." (307)

In another passage Chick questions other statements which Gavin makes about himself:

¹¹⁸Edward M. Holmes, Faulkner's Twice-Told Tales: His Re-Use of His Material (The Hague: Mouton and Company, 1966), p. 24.

¹¹⁹Lewis Leary, William Faulkner of Yoknapatawpha County (New York: Thomas J. Crowell Company, 1973), p. 169.

His Uncle Gavin always said he was not really interested in truth nor even in justice: that all he wanted was just to know, to find out, whether the answer was any of his business or not; and that all means to that end were valid, provided he left neither witnesses nor incriminating evidence. Charles didn't believe him; some of his methods were not only too hard, they took too long; and there are some things you simply do not do even to find out. But his uncle said that Charles was wrong: that curiosity is another of the mistresses whose slaves decline no sacrifice.

(343)

You will recall that in The Town Gavin had said to Flem: "You're like me, you don't give a damn about truth, all you want is justice." Gavin now claims not to care about either of these, but is only interested in a self-sustained right to curiosity and meddlesomeness. Shortly after Chick informs us of this new assertion by Gavin, Gavin writes the following on Linda's slate:

I am happy I was given the privilege of meddling with impunity in other people's affairs without really doing any harm by belonging to that avocation whose acolytes have been absolved in advance for holding justice above truth. I have been denied the chance to destroy what I loved by touching it.

(363)

He is right up to a point, but even as he justifies his conduct, he yet makes an expression from the darkness and obscurity. He will soon come to understand that the "without really doing any harm" and "absolved in advance" are self-told, self-perpetrated lies made in the presence of Old Master Himself.

One of the points is that "we are all in this together." With all of the rampant confusion, man's inability to distinguish between collective and individual moral responsibilities, the dual nature of Old Master, and the darkness and obscurity, one inescapable aspect of the condition is simply that "we are all in the same boat." Ratliff says:

"Fate, and destiny, and luck, and hope, and all of us mixed up in it--us and Linda and Flem and that durn little half-starved wildcat down there in Parchman, all mixed up in the same luck and destiny and fate and hope until can't none of us tell where it stops and we begin. Especially the hope. I mind I used to think that hope was about all folks had, only now I'm beginning to believe that that's about all anybody needs--just hope."

(373-4)

But this is not a novel of "hope" either--Gavin had made that speech in Intruder in the Dust, after which he had doubtlessly gone on hoping. For Gavin, it is the moment of understanding himself. "Old Moster just punishes; He don't play jokes." Gavin comes to see himself as much of a poor son of a bitch as Mink, Flem, or anyone else. As Michael Rice has mentioned in a more generalized context, "It is impossible to say which is cause and which is effect."¹²⁰ Gavin's part in Flem's murder is an assertion that he himself is "cause":

"I mean, you're not safe. Nobody is, around me. I'm dangerous. Can't you understand I've just committed murder?"

"Oh, that," Ratliff said, "I decided some time back that may be the only thing that would make you safe to have around would be for somebody to marry you. That never worked but at least you're all right now. As you just said, you finally committed a murder. What else is there beyond that for anybody to think up for you to do?"

(427)

Ratliff's announcement that Gavin is "all right now" would be a surprise except when the murder is seen as an antidote to Gavin's idealism. Ratliff refers not to Gavin's escape from Old Moster, but to his new-found understanding of Old Moster as a driving force within himself. Committing murder does not, of course, make on a moral person, fit to be pronounced "all right." But acknowledging, accepting, and living with one's

¹²⁰Michael Rice, "Myth and Legend: The Snopes Trilogy: The Hamlet, The Town and The Mansion," Unisa English Studies, 14(1976), p. 22.

guilt and the consequences of one's actions, nearly does. It comes as close as any expression or definition of morality to be found in Faulkner's literature. When Faulkner was asked if he thought any of his characters succeeded in being affirmative and he replied, "Yes I do. There was Gavin Stevens. He was a good man," the author was right to mention him before such persons as Dilsey, Lena Grove, and Miss Jenny. These characters endure, but Gavin understands and endures.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

"It was eight years ago that Uncle Gavin said. . . how there is a corruption even in just looking at evil, even by accident; that you can't haggle, traffic, with putrefaction--you can't, you don't dare."¹²¹

--Temple Drake

Gavin himself dared, not heeding the wisdom of his own earlier advice. He began his career as a lawyer-detective who looked at evil, observing the corruption of the murders in Knight's Gambit; in Intruder in the Dust and Requiem for a Nun, he haggled with it, struggling to understand and come to terms with it; in The Town and The Mansion he is in the mainstream of the traffic, himself participant. To look at it becomes to desire it; to haggle with it is to struggle with resistance; to traffic in it is not only to participate, but even to instigate. Gavin himself falls into the same dilemma and position as Temple Drake, who had not heeded his warning either. "You can't, you don't dare," because you, too, will succumb to the putrefaction.

In the previous chapter I quoted Faulkner's assertion that Gavin Stevens was a "good man." I now wish to present the quotation in its entirety in order to explain further Faulkner's final conception of this character:

¹²¹William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 112.

"There was Gavin Stevens. He was a good man but he didn't succeed in living up to his ideal. But his nephew, the boy, I think he may grow up to be a better man than his uncle. I think he may succeed as a human being."¹²²

Faulkner made this statement in 1955, before he completed The Town and The Mansion. In the last two chapters I discussed Gavin's failure to live up to the ideal, which is true not only in these stories, but in his earlier appearances as well. In my conclusion I wish to show his "success as a human being," which is accomplished in the novels written after Faulkner made this comment; and because it is, perhaps more than anything else (and at least as important as the circumstances surrounding Flem Snopes), the most important item of concern in these works. Gavin remains a failure as an idealist--he is that by definition because he clings to the "ancestral vices" of the moral code of the Old South. In this way he will always fail; but he does not fail as a human being, not finally, as Faulkner had indicated in his statement in 1955.

Gavin Stevens, as he was finally depicted by William Faulkner, is a man who is the sum of his parts, and who successfully overcomes the faults of these parts by understanding himself.

The first such part comes out of the years when he was still a one-dimensional lawyer-detective. I have suggested that the theme of the stories in the Knight's Gambit collection should rightfully be taken as "Man, know thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride," as recorded in "An Error in Chemistry."¹²³ Michael Millgate, as quoted in Chapter

¹²²James B. Meriwether, Lion in the Garden (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 225.

¹²³William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 131.

II, has seen that the "element of moral intention involved here is directly related to the developing presentation of Gavin Stevens."¹²⁴ In The Town and The Mansion, as we have seen, Gavin becomes aware of how self-blind he has been--he comes to understand his own arrogance and vanity and pride in such matters as imprisoning Montgomery Ward Snopes on false charges, taking Hoak McCarron to Linda Snopes's wedding, and defaulting on a loan made at Flem Snopes's bank, to mention only a very few. Arrogance, vanity, and pride are not abstract qualities which only the impersonator Flint is subject to. Gavin comes to see that these words accurately describe his own behavior and being.

The second part is recorded in Intruder in the Dust, where Chick as a young boy learns a lesson which Gavin must later learn as a man. When Chick realizes that in digging up Vinson Gowrie's grave he was unearthing the putrefaction of the white race's conscience and its moral decay, the author writes that he "now realized the enormity of what he had blindly meddled with. . . ."¹²⁵ This is the second part of Gavin's character which later is integrated into the whole. Gavin, in The Mansion, comes to realize, exactly, the "enormity of what he had blindly meddled with." Before the murder of Flem he had always considered himself aloof from the moral putrefactions of mere meddling. He loses that; he comes to understand that his years of meddling in

¹²⁴Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 268.

¹²⁵William Faulkner, Intruder in the Dust (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 137.

the lives of those around him have had an enormous effect, even a death toll.

Similarly, another such comparison can be made to Requiem for a Nun. In this work Gavin labored to get a confession from Temple Drake that she was actually responsible for the murder of her infant daughter. As we have seen, he does succeed in securing an admission of guilt from her, although the efficacy of such a confession is, at best, dubious. In The Mansion, Gavin has to make such a confession to himself (or, at least, to Ratliff). Gavin, through Linda and Mink, is as responsible for Flem's murder as Temple, through Nancy, is for her own daughter's.

Faulkner has accomplished some multiple and complex role-swapping here; Gavin Stevens, in one way or another--at one time or another--swaps places with Flint, Chick, and Temple. Flint as an impersonator is exposed as a murderer by Gavin because of his arrogance and vanity and pride; later Gavin perceives these qualities in himself which more or less exposes himself, to himself, as a murderer. In Intruder in the Dust Chick's realization about the enormity of blindly meddling transforms him from a boy into a man; it later does virtually the same thing for Gavin, even when the lawyer is over fifty years old. Gavin undergoes the same experience as Chick before him. Similarly, he comes to occupy the same position as Temple Drake; he has to admit his responsibility for murder just as she had.

Faulkner, then, developed Gavin's character primarily by having him achieve understandings about himself which he had already made in other characters and in society at large. In accomplishing this, he is a multifaceted character, not a fragmented one. In the earlier works

he had played first one role and then another; in The Town and The Mansion, where Faulkner moved to a final conception of this man, he plays all of them at the same time and with great consistency as a person; his characterization is never flighty, disjointed, or spasmodic.

In my introductory chapter I identified the problem of two chronologies in his development, thinking that there might be some inconsistencies to be reconciled from one work to another. Briefly, the problem is that the order in which the books were written does not follow the order of Gavin's natural aging as a person. I was right in recognizing the two chronologies, and equally right in suspecting inconsistencies, which are numerous. It is important to note in retrospect, however, that Faulkner himself had already seen these discrepancies in chronology and rather summarily dismissed them in the prefatory note to The Mansion:

This book is the final chapter of, and the summation of, a work conceived and begun in 1925. Since the author likes to believe, hopes that his entire life's work is apart of a living literature, and since "living" is motion, and "motion" is change and alteration and therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death, there will be found discrepancies and contradictions in the thirty-four-year progress of this particular chronicle; the purpose of this note is simply to notify the reader that the author has already found more discrepancies and contradictions than he hopes the reader will--contradictions and discrepancies due to the fact that the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago; and is sure that, having lived with them that long time, he knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did then.¹²⁶

"Discrepancies and contradictions" indeed. After identifying the sundry references to Gavin's age and trying to fix the various works in a cer-

¹²⁶William Faulkner, The Mansion (New York: Random House, 1959), prefatory note.

tain calendar year, I find it cannot always be done with much confidence and exactness. Gavin's age is consistent in all the works written before The Town and The Mansion, and it is basically consistent within these two works. But some items in places other than the Snopes trilogy cannot be matched with those in it. The matter should not, however, be left at that for a number of reasons.

First of all, the two chronologies are generally consistent; the inconsistencies are only evident when we try to apply a calendrical precision for which Faulkner himself had little or no use. Consider Chick's age, for example: in Knight's Gambit he is eighteen at the time of Pearl Harbor; in The Town he is twelve when Eula kills herself in 1927. There is no way these two dates can ever be reconciled. The author is consistent in such things as theme and characterization, even though he does often mix up details.

Second, whenever Gavin's age is important to the story, it is given. For example, in "Knight's Gambit" when he marries Melisandre Harriss it is significant that he is fifty, so this is mentioned. Another story, "Tomorrow," takes place at the beginning of Gavin's career as a lawyer recently elected to the office of County Attorney. It is important within the story that it took place early in the career of the young lawyer so this fact is, accordingly, mentioned. Similarly, in The Town and The Mansion, Gavin's age is recorded when it helps further the themes or plots of the works. For example, Faulkner tells us that he is "twenty-two or twenty-three" when he plants the rake tooth in the road for De Spain's tires.

Third, when Faulkner wrote The Town and The Mansion he took effort to fill up the holes--the vacant periods of Gavin's life of which he had not previously written. Appendix I, a chronology of Gavin's life as events would have occurred year by year, verifies this. It is more evidence of the author's rather predominant concern for Gavin's development in the Snopes trilogy. Moreover, the existing consistencies are far more impressive in number and rectitude than the discrepancies. They hardly add up, however, to a complete biography of Gavin.

No matter which chronology we scrutinize, Gavin becomes a "success as a human being," even though he remains a failure as a moral idealist. Both chronologies converge, finally, on the same date in 1946. This success occurs in time; it is not true of him when Faulkner made his statement in 1955, but it is true by the time he had finished writing the Snopes trilogy. Both chronologies appropriately culminate with the death of Flem Snopes on the last Thursday of September, 1946.

What does it mean to be a "success as a human being" in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi? Gavin does not "achieve self-actualization," read I'm OK, You're OK, have a religious experience, or even reach some long-set goal. What he does do is to survive the putrefaction with a sense of moral dignity. Gavin's gradual decline does have an end to it. He looks at evil, haggles with it, and traffics in it; but, like Chick and unlike Temple, he survives it. Consider again the explanation of Faulkner's moral vision, made by Lawrance Thompson and quoted in Chapter I:

When Faulkner says that the only subject worth writing about is the problem of the human heart in conflict with itself, that metaphor implies his own capacity for recognizing that good must be born of

evil, man being man, and that evil keeps getting born of good, for the same reason. Faulkner's ambivalent and multivalent vision finds good and evil so inextricably related that they breed their opposites.¹²⁷

Thompson is speaking of Faulkner's literature as a whole, but certainly no better example of the legitimacy of this statement is to be found than in the person of Gavin Stevens. Gavin does not become "good"--rather, he comes to understand "his own capacity for recognizing that good must be born of evil, man being man," Mink being Mink, Flem being Flem, Gavin being Gavin. Good is born of evil in The Town and The Mansion. As Chick (and later Gavin) recognizes, Eula's suicide is to her a moral triumph; Flem's murder specifically brings about the end of Gavin's self-blindness. Conversely, "evil keeps getting born of good"--even Ratliff helps Gavin give the pay-off money to Mink. Good and evil are not only "inextricably related," but the terms are meaningful only as they pertain to one another. Moreover, in the Snopes trilogy it is Gavin's heart, and Gavin's alone, that is "in conflict with itself." Gavin succeeds as a human being because he understands this, not because he realizes that we are all "poor sons of bitches." This truth abets his conclusion, but it is not inconsistent with the inextricably relationship of good and evil--to come to see one's self as a "poor son of a bitch" may be prerequisite to such success.

I am still not prepared to say that The Town and The Mansion are Gavin's books, even though I do contend that he is equally as impor-

¹²⁷Lawrance Thompson, William Faulkner (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), p. 165.

tant in them as Flem Snopes and that the struggle of the human heart, here, is the struggle of Gavin's heart. The reason is that Faulkner, perhaps even for the sake of consistency, never permitted Gavin to move out of the bounds of his first role. In a detective story, there is almost always a difference between being the central character and being the center of attention. That is, the central character is the detective, and the center of attention is either the culprit or the victim. Such was true in the early detective stories in which Gavin appeared. As I have shown, Gavin never fully leaves behind the role of lawyer-detective, even though he does move into different and more complex roles; however, he never can be considered both the central character and the center of attention. He is sometimes one of these, sometimes the other, but never both. This in itself accounts for the great number of variations in previous interpretations of his character. Phrases frequently used (such as "detached observer," "Southern intellectual," "Faulknerian mouthpiece," and so on) may be true when Gavin is viewed either as a central character or as the center of attention in a particular work. But the established limitation renders the interpretations inadequate. This explains why they do not have consistent applicability from work to work. If we recognize Gavin's career as a movement toward becoming a success as a human being, the problems of the multiple interpretations disappear.

Three major items are evident in this movement toward Flem's murder, which accomplishes Gavin's success as a human being. First, both collective and individual moralities are consistently under fire as we go from novel to novel. The omnipresent moral code of the Old

South is only half the problem; it explains what Gavin is and accounts for his idealism; but it is not, not finally, the reason he helps Linda murder Flem and later gives money to Mink. The guilt for this final act of murder is individual, not social. Social pressures have been a contributing factor, but these are not the final explanation. Second, Gavin becomes more complex as Faulkner progressed from book to book. I have traced this increased complexity by showing his development from moral agent to moral guide to moral person. These terms are never mutually exclusive in their appropriateness; he never leaves one role behind but simply assumes another one as well. Third, Gavin's moral progress must be related to the fact that he sins more as he becomes aware of the corruption around him. Once again, he looks, haggles, and traffics himself all the way to the position of being responsible for murder.

Faulkner claims in his prefatory note to The Mansion that he knows his characters better in 1959 than he had thirty-four years earlier when the first of these began to appear in print. I think we have to agree with him, especially in terms of Gavin Stevens, whom he had first written of in 1931. The note was written after the editors, prior to the publication of The Mansion, sent him a rather long list of the "discrepancies and contradictions"¹²⁸ present in The Mansion and The Town and The Hamlet. Faulkner amended those which could be handled quickly, either by altering a date or adding or deleting a sentence or two. He dealt with the remainder of them in this note. This does not,

¹²⁸Joseph Blotner, ed., Selected Letters of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 406-455.

however, undermine the value of his comment that "living" is motion. People do change, especially over a period of thirty-four years, and fictional characters have as much right to this change as real persons; in fact, if they did not change, then their value to us would be undermined. Only the Hardy boys and the like can stay sixteen forever. Moreover, the first sentence of the note surely describes Gavin as much as anyone else in the book. The Mansion, in either chronology, is the "final chapter of, and the summation of," Gavin's character.

When we consider Faulkner's literature as a whole, then, Gavin Stevens should be placed among the greatest characters which the author conceived. Faulkner observed this man, haggled with his character, and trafficked in his development for nearly three decades. He makes more appearances, by far, than any other person in Faulkner's works. He is treated consistently and with uniformity of purpose, and while many of his actions are not good ones, he is essentially a good man. Other good men appear in Yoknapatawpha County--Ratliff, Eck Snopes, Miss Habersham, Lena Grove, Dilsey, etc., immediately come to mind. None of these, however, receive nearly the amount of attention and development that Gavin does. These other characters all had stories which could be told in a single work; Gavin's could not.

I want to permit Chick Mallison, who knows Gavin Stevens far better than I do, to summarize my interpretation of his uncle's character:

Because he is a good man, wise too except for the occasion when he would aberrate, go momentarily haywire and take a wrong turn that even I could see was wrong, and then go hell-for-leather, with absolutely no deviation from logic and rationality, from

there on, until he wound us up in a mess of trouble or embarrassment that even I would have had sense enough to dodge. But he is a good man. Maybe I was wrong sometimes to trust and follow him but I never was wrong to love him.¹²⁹

In following Gavin's development from book to book, the reader, too, comes to love him.

¹²⁹Faulkner, The Mansion, p. 230

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APPENDIX I

THE LIFE OF GAVIN STEVENS

- 1890 Gavin Stevens is born to Judge Lemuel Stevens and Maggie Dandridge Stevens. This date is the same in "Knight's Gambit" (Gavin is fifty years old two years before Pearl Harbor) and in the Snopes trilogy (Gavin is a year younger than Eula Varner Snopes, born in 1889).
- 1909 Gavin is at Harvard working on his A. B.
- 1913 Gavin is at Harvard working on his M. A. He returns to Jefferson and becomes rivals with Manfred de Spain in his quest to protect the honor of Eula Snopes; he is also City Attorney.
- 1914 Gavin goes to Heidelberg to work on his Ph. D.
- 1915 Gavin is in Europe during the war working for the American Field Service and the YMCA; he serves in the war for three years.
- 1918 Judge Lemuel Stevens, Gavin's father, dies. Gavin, now twenty-eight, travels into the county to find out why Jackson Fentry had hung the jury of his first case in "Tomorrow."
- 1922 Gavin returns to Jefferson for good, after being absent for most of the previous eight years, the last three of which had been spent at Heidelberg where he finished his Ph. D., and broke his engagement to Melisandre Backus.
- 1923 Gavin helps Flem Snopes send Montgomery Ward Snopes to Parchman Penitentiary.
- ca. 1925 Gavin, "somewhere in his middle thirties," exposes Boyd and Tyler Ballenbaugh for their murder of Lonnie Grinnup in "Hand Upon the Waters."
- 1927 Gavin encourages Linda Snopes to go away to college; he secures Flem's monument for Eula Snopes's grave.
- 1930 Gavin, who is called "district attorney" in "Hair," explains why Hawkshaw paid off the Starnes's mortgage and married the young Reed girl.
- 1931 Gavin meets a professor friend at the train station and explains the motivation of Joe Christmas in his murder of Joanna Burden.

- ca. 1932 Gavin exposes Granby Dodge for his murder of Judge Dukinfield in "Smoke."
- 1936 Gavin and Ratliff travel to New York to be guests at the wedding of Linda Snopes and Bart Kohl, who is killed a few months later in the Spanish Civil War.
- 1937 Gavin meets Linda Snopes upon her return to Jefferson.
- 1938 Gavin takes Temple Drake to the governor's chambers in Jackson to elicit a confession of her guilt in the murder of her daughter.
- 1940 Gavin acts as lawyer for Lucas Beauchamp. He exposes the impersonator Flint for his murders of Pritchell and his daughter in "An Error in Chemistry." He travels to Jackson and learns that Monk Odlethorpe had murdered the prison warden under the influence of the inmate Terrel. (Only "An Error in Chemistry" and "Monk" cannot be fixed in a specific year. I place them ca. 1940 because of Chick's role as narrator. In both stories he is obviously a young man, yet under Gavin's wing but not his mother's.
- 1941 Gavin brings home the body of Butch Beauchamp in "Go Down, Moses." He prevents the murder of Captain Gualdres by Max Harriss in "Knight's Gambit." Linda Snopes urges Gavin to marry.
- 1942 Gavin marries Melisandre Harriss.
- 1946 Gavin petitions the governor for Mink Snopes's early release from prison.

APPENDIX II

SELECTED MORAL STATEMENTS MADE BY GAVIN STEVENS

Note: This list is provided for two reasons: one, the statements are consistently of interest in themselves; and, two, they exist as evidence of Faulkner's concern for the moral development of the character. (Page numbers from the primary sources are given.)

Knight's Gambit:

"Smoke":

"Ah," he said. "But isn't justice always unfair? Isn't it always composed of injustice and luck and platitude in unequal parts?"

(24)

He was talking about smoking again, about how a man never really enjoys tobacco until he begins to believe that it is harmful to him, and how non-smokers miss one of the greatest pleasures in life for a man of sensibility: the knowledge that he is succumbing to a vice which can injure himself alone.

(25)

. . . there are two places where a man does not look at faces: in the sanctuaries of civil law, and in public lavatories.

(30)

"Hand Upon the Waters":

That one man, even an amateur at murder, might be satisfied that he had cleaned up after himself. But when there are two of them, neither one is going to be satisfied that the other has left no ravelings.

(74)

. . . there is in Negroes an instinct not for evil but to recognize evil at once when it exists.

(75)

"Tomorrow":

"This is not cricket," he said. "But justice is accomplished lots of times by methods that won't bear looking at."

(88-9)

But Uncle Gavin says it don't take many words to tell the sum of any human experience; that somebody has already done it in eight: He was born, he suffered and he died.

(98)

"An Error in Chemistry":

"It's women who murder their spouses for immediate personal gain--insurance policies or at what they believe is the instigation or promise of another man. Men murder their wives from hatred or rage or despair, or to keep them from talking since not even bribery not even simple absence can bridle a woman's tongue."

(112)

"Knight's Gambit":

. . . that you went to war, and young men would always go, for glory because there was no other way so glorious to earn it, and the risk and fear of death was not only the only price worth buying what you bought, but the cheapest you could be asked, and the tragedy was, not that you died but that you were no longer there to see the glory; you didn't want to obliterate the thirsting heart: you wanted to slake it.

(232)

Light in August:

"I imagine that after thirty years the machinery for hoping requires more than twenty-four hours to get started, to get into motion again."

(421)

Intruder in the Dust:

. . . his uncle had said that all man had was time, all that stood between him and the death he feared and abhorred was time yet he spent half of it inventing ways of getting the other half past. . . .

(30)

Two years ago his uncle had told him that there was nothing wrong with cursing; on the contrary it was not only useful but substituteless but like everything else valuable it was precious only because the supply was limited and if you wasted it on nothing on its urgent need you might find yourself bankrupt. . . .

(42)

. . . he remembered his uncle saying once how little of vocabulary man really needed to get comfortably and even efficiently through his life, how not only in the individual but within his whole type and race and kind a few simply cliches served his few simple passions and needs and lusts.

(47-8)

. . . no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors.

(49)

Just remember that they [women] can stand anything, accept any fact (it's only men who burk at facts) provided they don't have to face it; can assimilate it with their heads turned away and one hand extended behind them as the politician accepts the bribe. Look at her [Chick's mother] : who will spend a long contented happy life never abating one jot of her refusal to forgive you for being able to button your own pants.

(107)

"It took an old woman and two children for that, to believe truth for no other reason than that it was truth, told by an old man in a fix deserving pity and belief, to someone capable of the pity even when none of them really believed him."

(126)

". . . the whole chronicle of man's immortality is in the suffering he has endured, his struggle toward the stars in the stepping-stones of his expiations."

(154-5)

"Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them."

(206)

"It's all right to be righteous. . . . Just don't stop."

(210)

Requiem for a Nun:

"We're not concerned with death. That's nothing; any handful of petty facts and sworn documents can cope with that. That's all finished now; we can forget it. What we are trying to deal with now is injustice. Only truth can cope with that. Or love."

(76-7)

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."

(80)

"It was eight years ago that Uncle Gavin said. . . how there is a corruption even in just looking at evil, even by accident; that you can't haggle, traffic, with putrefaction--you can't, you don't dare."

(112)

"It was as though she realised for the first time that you-- everyone--must, or anyway may have to, pay for your past; that past is something like a promissory note with a trick clause in it which, as long as nothing goes wrong, can be manipulated in an orderly manner, but which fate or luck or chance, can fore-close on you without warning."

(140)

"But you never really give up hope, you know, not even after you finally realise that people not only can bear anything, but probably will have to. . . ."

(140)

The Town:

So you see how much effort a man will make and trouble he will invent to guard and defend himself from the boredom of peace of mind.

(135)

You see? That was it: the very words reputation and good name. Merely to say them, speak them aloud, give their existence vocal recognition, would irrevocably soil and besmirch them, would destroy the immunity of the very things they represented, leaving them not just vulnerable but already doomed; from the inviolable and proud integrity of principles they would become, reduced to, the ephemeral and already doomed and damned fragility of human conditions; innocence and virginity become symbol and postulant of loss and grief, evermore to be mourned, existing only in the past tense was and now is not, no more no more.

(202)

. . . women are not interested in truth or romance but only in facts whether they are true or not, just so they fit all the other facts. . . .

(286)

The Mansion:

"When you are just ashamed of something, you don't hate it. You just hate getting caught."

(110)

"The music and the ideas both come out of obscurity, darkness. Not out of shadow: out of obscurity, obfuscation, darkness. Man must have light. He must live in the fierce full constant glare of light, where all shadow will be defined and sharp and unique and personal: the shadow of his own singular rectitude or baseness. All human evils have to come out of obscurity and darkness, where there is nothing to dog man constantly with the shape of his own deformity."

(132-3)

"Grown people can't bear surprise unless they are promised in advance they will want to own it."

(173)

"When you are a little older you will discover that people really are much more gentle and considerate and kind than you want right now to believe."

(201)

"These are good times, boom halcyon times when what do you want with justice when you've already got welfare? Now the law is the last resort, to get your hand into the pocket which so far has resisted or foiled you."

(207)

"Man ain't really evil, he just ain't got any sense."

(230)

"Just to hate evil is not enough. You--somebody--has got to do something about it."

(307)

His Uncle Gavin always said he was not really interested in truth nor even in justice: that all he wanted was just to know, to find out, whether the answer was any of his business or not: and that all means to that end were valid, provided he left neither hostile witnesses nor incriminating evidence. Charles didn't believe him; some of his methods were not only too hard, they took too long; and there are some things you simply do not do even to find out. But his uncle said that Charles was wrong: that curiosity is another of the mistresses whose slaves decline no sacrifice.

(343)

"I am happy I was given the privilege of meddling with impunity in other people's affairs without really doing any harm by belonging to that avocation whose acolytes have been absolved in advance for holding justice above truth. I have been denied the chance to destroy what I loved by touching it."

(363)

"I not only believe in and am an advocate of fate and destiny, I admire them; I want to be one of the instruments too, no matter how modest."

(368)

"A bad man will work ten times as hard and make ten times the sacrifice to be credited with at least one virtue no matter how Spartan, as the upright man will to avoid the most abject vice provided it's fun."

(375)

"But I am not a coward: I am a humanitarian. . . . You are not even original; that word is customarily used as a euphemism for it."

(379)

"I'm not really an evil man," Stevens said. "I wouldn't have loaned Mink a gun to shoot Flem with; I might not even have just turned my head while Mink used his own. But neither am I going to lift my hand to interfere with Flem spending another day or two expecting any moment that Mink will."

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"There aren't any morals," Stevens said. "People just do the best they can."

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"People. . . the poor sons of bitches."

(429)

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Carl Singleton has been read and approved by the following committee:

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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 15, 1982
Date

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Director's Signature